

**THE DARK SIDE**



**DIGITAL**

# FEATHERED FIENDS

**THE MAKING OF  
HITCHCOCK'S THE BIRDS**

**ALL  
NEW-ALL  
DIGITAL**

## SAW POINT

**WAS ANOTHER TEXAS  
CHAINSAW MOVIE REALLY  
NECESSARY?**

## PUPPET MASTER

**A NO-STRINGS-ATTACHED CHAT  
WITH JEFF BURR...**

## WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT DAMIEN

**MIKE HODGES ON WHY HE  
DIDN'T DIRECT OMEN II...**

## CENTREFOLD ANGEL

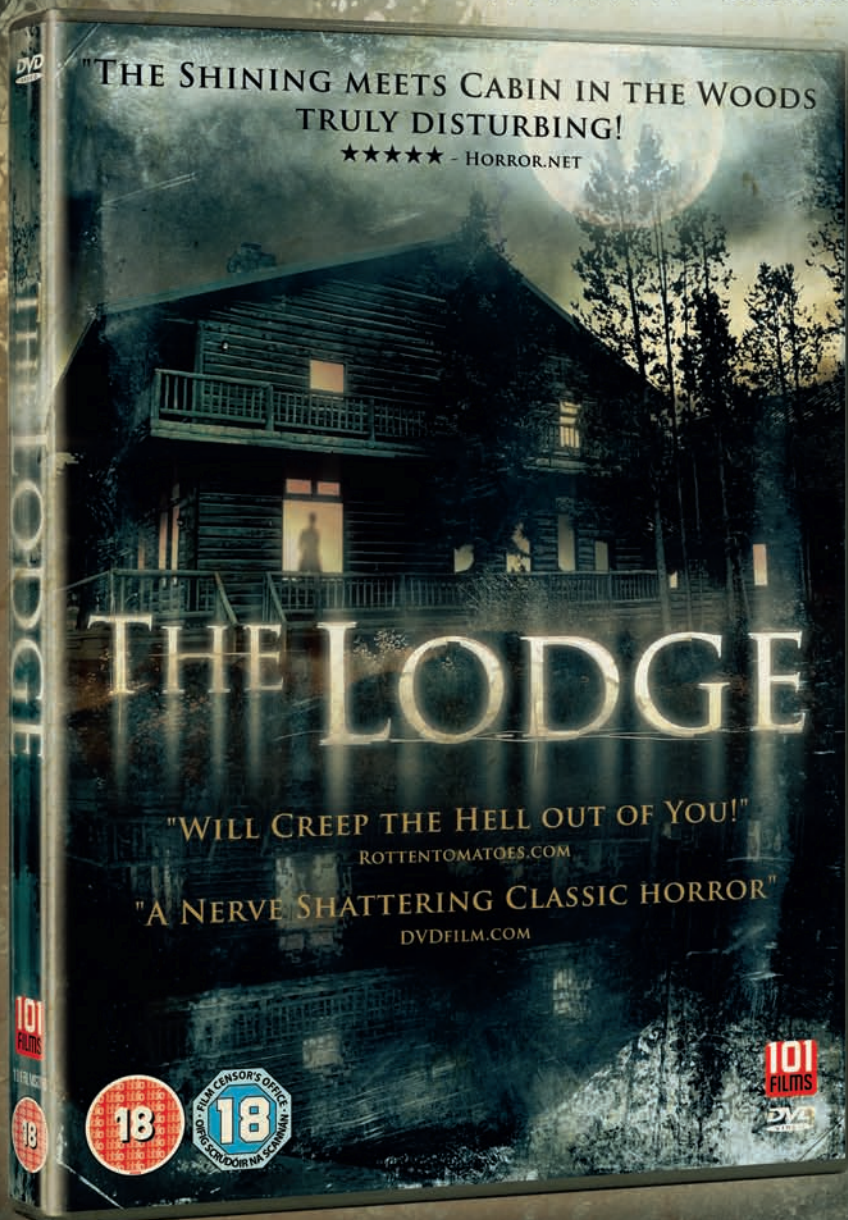
**JENNIFER ASHLEY'S SCREAM  
QUEEN CAREER...**

**DSD - ISSUE 02**



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# A WARM WELCOME TO THE DARKSIDE DIGITAL

**H**ello again and welcome to our second all-digital *Dark Side*. Our first seems to have gone down well with regular readers and we have picked up a number of extra foreign subscribers to the print issue because of it, which is extremely encouraging. Right up front I'd like to thank the companies who are sponsoring the digital magazine, these being the estimable 101 Films, always great supporters of the print mag, [www.dragondark.com](http://www.dragondark.com), a great sci-fi and fantasy website that gets our firm recommendation, [www.cult-labs.com](http://www.cult-labs.com), the UK's biggest - and friendliest - cult cinema forum, and [www.insertdisctwo.com](http://www.insertdisctwo.com), an exciting and innovative new computer games review site. The most notable difference between the print issues and the digital ones can be seen with the covers. Our resident artist Rick Melton does all the print covers, while we have decided to use pre-existing stills or poster art for the cover of the digi. Rick is pretty much snowed under at the moment and couldn't possibly knock out a cover a month for us. Of course the covers he does serve up are uniformly brilliant in my view. I think his Amicus one was the best so far, though the Hammer cover ran it a close second, and I still love the shark zombie one he did a few issues back.

I just watched the movie of *The Sweeney*, by the way. Okay, I know this doesn't come into the territory normally explored by *DS*, but I was a big fan of the old TV show and still watch the odd episode from time to time, my favourite being *Ringer*, with Ian Hendry, Brian Blessed and Alan Lake as a trio of hardmen robbers. That's the one which has the most famous *Sweeney* line of all: "We're the Sweeney, son, and we haven't had our dinner."

To be honest I didn't have high hopes for *The Sweeney* film, since director Nick Love is not known for his clever scripting. The original *Sweeney* was of course the creation of Ian Kennedy Martin, one of TV's greatest writers and brother of *The Italian Job*'s Troy. Nick Love gave us *The Football Factory* and *The Business*.

The best thing on paper about the new *Sweeney* was the casting of Ray Winstone as Jack Regan. On screen, however, it's clear that no matter how great an actor Ray may be, he's way too old for the role. As for Ben Drew, aka 'Plan B', as George Carter, well I have no complaints about his acting but he's basically playing the same chavvy hoodie he portrayed in *Harry Brown*, and the scene where he slaps Regan round the face is ridiculous.

Even more so are the scenes in which fat, sweaty fiftysomething Ray beds sexy young *Sweeney* recruit Hayley Atwell. It may be nice work if you can get it for Ray, but these sequences are shot in porno style and not at all pleasant to watch.

The skimpy plot concerns Regan's bulldog-like hunt for a gang of brutal armed robbers led by arrogant Mr. Big, Paul Anderson. At one point Regan is framed and ends up inside, where he fills a sock with batteries as his enemies close in - a not so subtle nod to *Scum*.

The action scenes are pretty good, but not in any way believable. The centrepiece is an ambitious *Heat*-style gun battle in central London with museums, monuments and passing tourists being peppered with bullets by fleeing robbers armed with machine guns. Kudos to the filmmakers for staging this so effectively, but it's extremely daft, fantasy world stuff which must have been shot very early in the morning because Trafalgar Square is never so deserted in real life. The *Sweeney* movie is certainly entertaining enough for the beer and curry Friday night crowd, but it lacks the cutting edge characterisation and cynical humour of its role model. Even the ever-watchable Alan Ford - so good in *Cockneys Vs Zombies* - gets precious little to work with as an old school villain who helps Regan out.

Anyway, onwards and upwards, get your trousers on and let's get on with issue 2 of *DS Digital*. Remember, speak well of your enemies, after all, you made them. **Allan Bryce.**

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# FEAR AND LOATHING IN THE FRIGHT FILM UNDERGROUND

**I**n a recent print issue of *The Dark Side* we spoke to prominent indie-filmmaker Jeff Burr about his time working on such fondly remembered VHS-era flicks as his compilation movie debut *From a Whisper to a Scream* (which featured one of the last screen turns from Vincent Price) and the slick-sequel *The Stepfather II*. The fine fellow also chatted about his work on the troubled sequel *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*, a high-profile project which should have led him into the big time but instead resulted in a career tailspin and a near-Alan Smithee experience. And it is here where we pick up this second instalment...

**Your sequel *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* had lots of troubles with the MPAA and New Line Cinema had to hold it back from theatrical release in America for quite some time. Can you detail some of these problems?**

It is ironic because *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* is by far my most well known movie. Now I am not saying it is all *that* well known, but insofar as my movies go it is the most well known one. I worked four months on it. I worked July, August, September and October of 1989. It was supposed to come out around Halloween '89 and then it got delayed because the American censorship board, the MPAA, kept saying it was too violent, it was too graphic, it was too this and it was too that. It ended up coming out in January of 1990. It was a very strange period for me. That time, from November until January, when it came out, was a weird limbo for me, a very strange period in my life just because I was blindsided by this whole thing. I had never gone through something like this. I was 27 years old and very naïve in a lot of ways about the realities of the film business, and I didn't handle it particularly well, but it did make me figure out that I wanted to do independent movies so in the nineties, right up until now, that is what I have done. My heart and mind is with the independent movies that you can totally control and that is all because of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*.

**Did you have the chance to deliver a final cut of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*?**

We were on the mixing stage, mixing the movie and cutting the negative at the same time to make the October 1989 release date. Then when the release date was cancelled, October 30<sup>th</sup> or whatever it was, and the theatres knew they weren't going to have *Leatherface*, everything shut down. I was totally out of the loop by that point.

*The Puppet Master's* deadly marionettes go up in flames in a scene from the second movie in the series



***Calum Waddell continues his epic chat with Jeff Burr - a man of many macabre talents who has handled the likes of Leatherface, Pumpkinhead, deadly puppets, demonic scarecrows and even the horrors of war in his impressive CV...***

**Is it true that New Line Studios, who produced the movie, actually fired you?**

I wasn't officially fired by New Line Studios but I was 'let go' in that they said 'see you, you've done all you can do and now we're going to do our bit.' Not that I cared... I really did not want to deal with it anymore.

**The film had a new ending imposed on it. You didn't shoot that did you?**

No I didn't but, listen, I would have shot what they wanted. I would have loved to have done that – but they had some test screenings in New York and that is when another director, this guy – more of an editor than a director, Mike Knue came in. He had edited *The Hidden* and a lot of other stuff for New Line – he came in and shot the ending that now exists in the movie, based on test screenings that they had done and characters that they wanted to bring back.

**Right, so at the end of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*, we see the actor Ken Forre return with a small plaster over his head. And this is despite the fact that ten minutes earlier Leatherface cut through his skull with a chainsaw...**

Yeah, so it is not to say that the new stuff they added was horribly directed or anything, but it is *horribly* confused. It is appalling to me, and that, in my opinion, defined the most cynical attitude of studio horror films – 'oh the audience won't care if it doesn't make any sense. We'll bring back this character because we want him for the next movie or whatever,' which is just ludicrous. If this sequel isn't any good there won't be a next movie!

**Were you responsible for the fantastic Excalibur theatrical trailer for *Chainsaw III*?**

No, that was done before I even came onboard for the movie. And that's the thing – when I saw the trailer, and I don't know if that's what actually gave me the idea, but at the end of my movie I wanted to put Leatherface on a horse... You know, chasing the girl on a horse with a chainsaw. That would have been an incredible image (*laughs*). But we could not do that. I think in the next chainsaw movie someone should put Leatherface on a horse. It would be awesome. Just to have him thundering through the forest...

**At the same time as New Line was organising *Chainsaw III*, they were also prepping *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5* – which went through a few directors and screenwriters too – were you ever part of that?**

God no, that would have been great, because there were three directors in a row who went from a *Nightmare* movie to a huge budget Hollywood movie – like Renny Harlin, Chuck Russell, Stephen Hopkins, these guys.

**And you wanted to do an Alan Smithee on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*, right?**

What happened was that as all of this stuff was going on - the re-shoots and the test screenings and the censorship fiasco - I called Mike De Luca.

**Just to inform those who will be reading this and might not know his name, Mike De Luca went on to become the President of Production at New Line Studios, is famous for green lighting the *Lord of the Rings* films, overseeing titles such as *Austin Powers*, *Boogie Nights* and *Rush Hour* and now runs his own company - making the likes of the *Fright Night* remake. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* was his first gig as a producer...**







**Above:**  
Scenes from  
Jeff Burr's  
*Leatherface:  
The Texas  
Chainsaw  
Massacre III*

Yeah, he is basically one of the most powerful guys in Hollywood. So I called Mike and I said, 'Look I want my name off the movie,' because the way Bob Shaye [Note: then President at New Line] had come in and hacked at it, and the way the MPAA had hacked at it, and the new ending – I mean, honestly, have it say it was directed by Donald Duck because I don't care (laughs). So De Luca said, 'No we have already printed up reel one' because reel one was the only reel without any changes and reel one had the credits. The other thing you should know, if I have total control of a movie – meaning, final cut, no interference at all, it will be a Jeff Burr film. If I don't have that it says 'directed by a Jeff Burr' and that is the one thing that I have for myself. They wanted to say, 'a Jeff Burr film' and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* certainly was not that. So they didn't put that on it, and I asked to have my name taken off the movie, but as I wasn't a Director's Guild of America member I had no pull. I mean, if I was part of the Director's Guild they would have had to do it. It would go through this aberration period. But basically De Luca said no – and we got in a screaming match over the phone, 'I want my name off the fucking movie' and he basically said, 'fuck you' and hung up. 'Fuck you' are basically the last words that Mike De Luca said to me.

**So one of the most powerful guys in the film industry really gave you a fine farewell...**

Yeah, but at least he never said, 'you'll never work in this town again' (laughs).

**OK, let's move away from *Chainsaw* and talk about a film of yours I really like - *Night of the Scarecrow*. I'm surprised that movie was not a bigger success because it is a really solid little project...**

Well the problem with that movie is that it was just bad timing for many reasons. It was a low budget movie, I hope it doesn't look it, but it was made for less than \$2 million and both companies that made it went out of business. They were going to put it out theatrically on a double bill, I thought that was a cool idea. I think it was going to go out with one of the *Witchboard* sequels. But the problem is that Saturday and Sunday matinees don't really exist anymore and this film was a hard R rated movie, not really for ten year-old kids, although I'm sure they would love it (laughs).

**Am I right in saying you used some CGI in that movie? Now this was back in 1995 so it was very unusual for an indie filmmaker to do that...**

Yes, we did have CGI but very, very little – a scant few digital shots and that is it. There was a sequence of the scarecrow coming out of a bay of hay, and that was CGI, but in the original script it was full of these effects. It was meant to be a \$10 million movie...

**Any chance of a DVD release for it?**

I tell you, I am trying to talk to the producers about doing a DVD, but I don't know if the rights have resorted to them or if a company called Republic control it. It is one of those titles that didn't do particularly well on video when it first came out. It was totally under the radar even though they had a really cool poster and everything. But sadly it didn't do the proverbial jack shit – in fact it didn't do anything! I think that they're not exactly chomping at the bit to get it out on DVD. It is a library title, and we did a little documentary on the making of it, so it would be a cool DVD to do.

**When I first met you, you seemed surprised that I even remembered the movie, telling me 'no one knows about that film'...**

Yeah, I love that (laughs)! A friend of mine called Tom Callaway shot it. And Bob Murawski – who edited the *Spider-Man* franchise, he also edited the movie and, of course, he has since become the head of Grindhouse, the rescuer of *The Beyond* – and that was the first time we worked together and he did a bang up job. All of these people put all of this effort into the movie, and that is the frustrating part, because nobody really saw it. But I have seen some reviews and some people really respect the effort. And all I want from anybody – if they see a movie of mine, at least they know that somebody gave it their all... I've never understood the concept of a director 'walking through a picture' – what does that mean? I have never understood that.

**After the turmoil of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* were you hesitant to do more sequels? You, of course, went on to do two follow-ups to *Puppet Master* and also *Pumpkinhead II*...**





Well here is the thing, I had done an independent movie called *Eddie Presley*, which took about a year and a half to do. It was a very low budget movie shot on 16mm, which I didn't make any money from and got no salary – just a labour of love. So then I had to work, and to make a living I did *Puppet Master IV* and *Puppet Master V*. I shot them both simultaneously in Romania.

**And they came out pretty well, all things considered. Can you speak about *Pumpkinhead II*?**

After I did the two *Puppet Master* movies I was supposed to do this other film in Romania for Charlie Band but then I was called about *Pumpkinhead II*. Again, it was the same situation, which is why you do not say 'never say never' in Hollywood – because after *Leatherface* I said, 'I will never replace another director and have a short prep' and that is exactly what happened on *Pumpkinhead II*. Tony Randall - you know, the guy who did *Hellraiser II* - was going to direct the movie and I was told he dropped out at the last minute because he got a better offer with some other project. So they had to start shooting on a certain date, the script had already been developed and done and that is how I got involved in that. Again, it was like 'mission impossible' – a very short shoot, 20 days, we had less than \$1 million, which is a frustrating thing because that is one of these sequels that had a far lower budget than the original...

**Right, the first *Pumpkinhead* was famous for having some pretty extravagant effects work...**

Well, when you have a low budget sequel, that is designed for video, of course it has less money than the original movie but you would be surprised at how few people understand that and they expect the extravagance of the first feature all over again. Not that any of this really matters now – but I was frustrated at



the time because the original *Pumpkinhead* had a deeper budget and a very long shoot and prep and *Pumpkinhead II* was incredibly quick and it was really like a fifties sci-fi thing. It is that kind of movie and that kind of production situation. Now I am happy with a lot of it considering what the odds were but is it a good movie? Absolutely not – I know that it flies fast and furious with the mythology from the first one. But I didn't write it. And to be honest I think it was written by people who didn't really have an affinity for horror films.

**There was never any plan to bring back Stan Winston to direct the sequel?**

No, not at all – we had no money for cast or anything – everybody who worked on that worked for scale.

**Linnea Quigley's brief cameo in *Pumpkinhead II* is at least memorable – she turns up, gets naked and gets**

**killed. Did you cast her personally?**

No, no, no – here is the weird thing about that. Even though I knew Linnea, and she is a total sweetheart and I love her, she was cast before I came onboard. The producers of the movie met her at a festival in Milan and said, 'you are going to be in *Pumpkinhead II*.' So that is how she was in it. It is not as if I said, 'I don't want Linnea Quigley – I want Brinke Stevens or whatever.'

**Above:**  
Clockwise  
from top left:  
A DIY family  
motto, 'Torch'  
from *Puppet  
Master 5*,  
*Pumpkinhead  
2* and director  
Jeff Burr

**Going back to your labour of love, *Eddie Presley*, shot in gloriously grainy 16mm and concerning a security guard who dreams of making it big as an Elvis impersonator. It is a film all about failed dreams, looking to the stars and hoping for the best... Can you talk about making this acclaimed indie-movie which few will have seen or heard of?**

It is a movie that was originated by a friend of mine as a play, so we worked for all of the





**Above:** The monstrous creature from *Pumpkinhead 2* and trigger-happy 'Six-Shooter' from *Puppet Master 5*

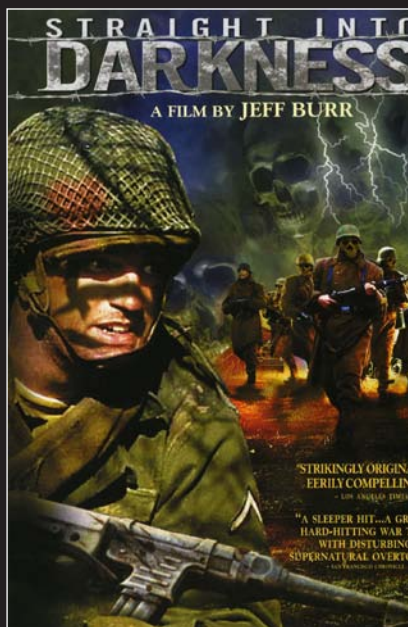
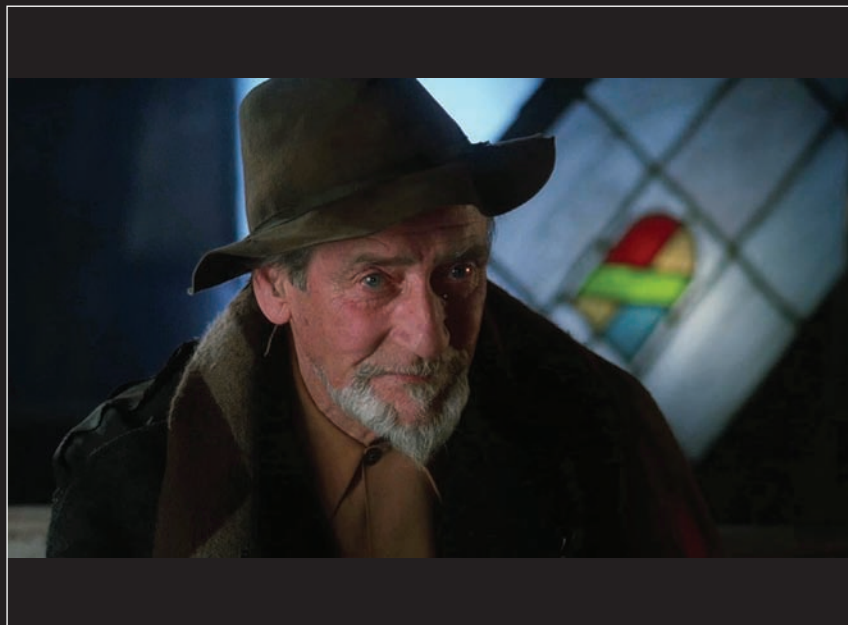
year developing it into a movie, we raised money independently and actually, inadvertently, Tobe Hooper helped me raise money. Because we had a business dinner at this famous restaurant in Hollywood that included investors from Texas. And lo and behold as we were walking out of the restaurant, Tobe Hooper walked in. I had met him a couple of times, and he said, 'Hey Jeff, how are you doing?' I said, 'Tobe, how are you? This is blah, blah', so it kind of made me look good - like 'Mr Hollywood' because I knew Tobe

Hooper (*laughs*). And I didn't really know him - he was just an acquaintance. But I got financing for the movie because I went back to my high school reunion and I met a girl who I was a friend with in high school. I also met her boyfriend, who wanted to get into movie production and she asked if it was okay if he called me. Well, yeah. So he called me, we got along great, he read the script of *Eddie Presley* and liked it and he raised money - ultimately about a \$300,000 movie, shot on 16mm and the Sundance channel played it.

#### **How did Quentin Tarantino come to have a brief appearance in it?**

I had met him at a screening of *Maniac Cop II* - and this was before he made *Reservoir Dogs*. So he was a friendly acquaintance I guess you could say - and I should say that I am a big fan of his and he is a big inspiration just in terms of how he has managed his career. Anyway Quentin did a little cameo, so did Bruce Campbell, Julie Rohde-Brown, Tim Thomerson's in it, but our star was Duane Whitaker who had a small part in *Leatherface*,





but who was in *Pulp Fiction*. A terrific actor and a pleasure to work with. But I will tell you this, *Eddie Presley* is a love or hate it movie. I tell people that they will either find it compelling and interesting, or they will find it extremely boring. I think it comes down to whether you are with this character or not and it has got its own rhythm – but a total labour of love and the type of movie you sweat over every frame and that's the kind of picture that I really enjoy doing and getting the time and freedom to make. In terms of casting, we had a very eclectic cast and I cast them myself. Just either people I knew or that I really liked, and we lucked into a lot of people.

**Above:**  
Gordon Currie  
in the title role  
of *The Puppet  
Master V: The  
Final Chapter*

#### After *Night of the Scarecrow* you moved away from working in horror...

Yeah, I was mostly doing kid's movies – *Johnny Mysto*, *Boy Wizard*, *The Boy with the X-Ray Eyes* and that sort of thing. Small budget children's adventure movies... I made them out in Romania. But I also did an action movie called *Spoiler*, a CD-ROM interactive movie called *American Hero*, but then the company, Atari, went bankrupt – a lot of people go bankrupt in this business and you have to watch out for that (*laughs*). I did work on a horror project called *The Devil's Den*, with *Leatherface* and *Dawn of the Dead*'s Ken Foree, but my name is not on it – which is another long story. However *The Devil's Den* started out because I wanted to do another low budget, very small intimate horror film. Recently I did a war movie called *Gun of the Black Sun*, again that was out in Romania. So I have done all kinds of movies, but certainly there is another horror flick planned... I love the genre.

#### What are some of your personal inspirations in the horror field?

I tend to like the more serious side – Romero, Cronenberg... And John Carpenter was always

a huge influence for me, especially seeing *Halloween* as a kid when I was still in high school. It is probably still the best experience I have had in a movie theatre in terms of audiences screaming their heads off – and they really were screaming their heads off, not acting or anything. So that was just a great experience. You were thinking, 'Man, I have got to get out of this movie because I cannot stand the tension. I know these people are going to scream and I don't want to hear it anymore.' So that was great and I am a big Carpenter fan.

#### Your most acclaimed project to date was probably your epic World War II film *Straight into Darkness*...

I think *Straight into Darkness* is, to me, what I have been trying to build towards. I would say that it is the calmativ effect of everything that I have done previously and that was the first movie I have done that I really felt confident about. I was firing off with all cylinders and that is my goal – to at least make something where you are firing off with all cylinders.

#### Funnily enough, despite it being a war movie you ended up doing the horror film festivals with it. I mean, that is how I saw *Straight into Darkness*...

Yeah, it was really the horror film festivals that programmed it, which is a disappointment to some...

#### Because it is not a horror film?

Well some people say it is a horror film but I agree with you. The main thing is just to make the movie you want and then hopefully people will respond to it.

#### The one thing that did surprise me about *Straight into Darkness* is that before seeing it I had read it was Bava-esque and it is nothing of the sort...

Right, yeah (*laughs*). I love Bava, he's fantastic, but the only thing we have in common with him is the use of mist! I think some people just see mist in a movie and go "Ah, that's Bava right there" (*laughs*).



# DARK SIDE HORROR CLASSIC

## KING KONG

1933



One of the greatest fantasy adventures ever made, *King Kong* has deservedly attained legendary status over the years, and no remake or Japanese rip-off ever came close to capturing the original film's sense of wonder.

The classic beauty and the beast fable, *Kong* opens with documentary filmmaker Robert Armstrong plucking pretty Fay Wray from the Depression-era breadline to cast her as the lead in his new movie. The problem is she has to travel with him and his filmmaking crew to the remote, uncharted Skull Island, a place inhabited by prehistoric beasts and ruled over by a huge ape called Kong.

Wray's beauty entrances the monstrous monkey and Armstrong uses this attraction to lure the creature into captivity. Back in New York, Kong escapes and causes mass destruction before climbing the Empire State for an appointment with movie immortality. A terrific script, fine acting and Willis O'Brien's amazing stop-motion effects combine to

produce sheer movie magic. Okay, so a lot of the movie trickery may look crude in the CGI age, but O'Brien's Kong has much more personality than any computer graphic.

Grossing \$90,000 its opening weekend, which was the biggest opening ever at the time, *King Kong* was also one of Adolf Hitler's two favourite movies - the other being *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The film saved RKO from bankruptcy, but they didn't show it any respect when reissuing it in 1938 in a cut form. Gone were scenes of Kong chewing and crushing human beings, and a racy sequence where the curious ape strips Fay Wray of her clothing. These scenes were restored in the 60s, but the legendary "spider pit" sequence remains tantalisingly unavailable.

Legend has it that the footage was cut because it was "too shocking" when shown to a test audience, but it's more likely the cuts were made because they stopped the

story and took away the focus of the terror on Kong. Best-selling British mystery/adventure writer Edgar Wallace was originally given the job of writing *King Kong's* screenplay and also a novel based on the script. Co-director Merian C. Cooper understood the commercial appeal of Wallace's name and planned to publicise the film as being "based on the novel by Edgar Wallace".

Sadly Wallace was to die in his Hollywood hotel room having written "not one bloody word" - according to Cooper. But Wallace retained a script credit for commercial reasons and apparently contributed, among other things, the "Ann's dress" scene. Wallace did complete a rough draft called *The Beast* on January 5, 1932, but he died on February 10, 1932 just after beginning revisions. After Wallace's death the screenplay was finished by Ruth Rose (wife of Cooper's director Ernest B. Schoedsack) and James A. Creelman.









# THE BUZZ IS BACK

*Texas Chainsaw 3D* hopes to pour some new petrol into the slice and dice spree of *Leatherface* and company. Calum Waddell talks to its director, John Luessenhop.



**Right:**  
Director John  
Luessenhop on  
set of *Takers*

**D**irected by John Luessenhop (who previously made the action-drama *Takers*) *Texas Chainsaw 3D* brings back the famous fright-franchise with an extra dimension of delirium. Set in the present day, and pitching itself as a direct sequel to the 1974 original, the movie tells of a young girl, played by the gorgeous Alexandra Daddario, who inherits a mansion near the same spot where the events of *Leatherface*'s initial power tool terror spree took place. Of course, whilst the locals believe that *Leatherface* and his cannibal clan were killed decades ago the opposite is true and, soon, everyone's favourite skin-mask wearing weirdo is ram-shaking his toolbox shed for a fresh spree of flesh-filleting fun. Ominously dropping the "massacre" part of the title (yes, this just *Texas Chainsaw 3D*) this latest instalment in Southern fried fear is entirely unrelated to the 2003 Michael Bay-produced remake and its 2006 prequel. Moreover, it claims no lineage to anything but Tobe Hooper's classic 1974 masterpiece - perhaps a promising start given the lukewarm reception that has greeted each of the other follow-ups. Indeed, this is an all-new spin on the splatter genre's most notorious brand-name and when *The Dark Side* catches up with Luessenhop he couldn't be more enthusiastic about his new gore epic - which opened in cinemas in January.

**So what made you decide to come onboard this project given that it has only been seven years since the last *Chainsaw* movie?**

Well, of course, the last movie was a remake - or rather a prequel to the remake - and this is actually an expansion of the original 1974 story. So the whole approach to this movie is to do something that the franchise has not done so far - which is to make a straight sequel, set in the present day, to the first film.

**What have been some of the challenges of making this movie?**

Well when I first came onboard the script was more like a 1990s horror film and our big challenge was to make it more contemporary - especially as regards the characters who we wanted to be believable. It was important that this was not just another slasher film, you know? And, also, shooting the movie in 3D - which involves very large and heavy equipment. The equipment we used got so hot that, during breaks, we had to cool it off with ice. Believe me, doing a 3D film is not easy [laughs].

**Were you a fan of Tobe's film before you signed up for this outing?**

Yeah, I mean - I really came into horror through making this movie but I did go

through Tobe's picture and picked out about 12 or 13 things that I loved about it. As we developed our own movie I made sure that some of the elements of the original which really stuck with me were sprinkled in the new *Chainsaw* too. Obviously there have been many sequels to Tobe's creation but in my opinion the first film is the big one - it is one of the greatest horror movies of all time. We really try and honour that.

**Although you do have Bill Moseley in the new *Chainsaw* movie. Was this in any way a homage to the 1986 sequel in which he plays Chop Top?**

Not really, although I don't mind if it is seen that way... I mean, I did see the second one, with the radio DJ and Chop-Top and stuff, and to be honest I thought it broke away from the terror of the original. It was intended that way, of course, because it was a spoof, but the only film we really wanted to pay homage to was the original. For instance, Tobe has some great long composition shots in his film - which is something you do not see a lot of in contemporary cinema - and we build on that. We use our 3D to do some wider shots and longer shots and with even more depth.

**As well as Moseley you do have some actors from the first film**



**make cameos - including Gunnar Hansen, Marilyn Burns and the original Grandpa, John Dugan - can you talk about this?**

Yeah, well the film begins in 1974 so we recreate that aspect of the original - with some of the old cast - and, actually, that was one of the most fun parts of the whole production. I remember coming down the driveway towards the rebuilt farmhouse and I had Gunnar Hansen with me. We had recreated the original Chainsaw house in its full scale and he looked at it and said, 'Oh my gosh, this is just amazing'. It was an emotional body blow for him. There it was right in front of Gunnar - the original Leatherface - and it was quite profound. And then when we got inside Gunnar was having a lot of fun just looking around and touching things - it was a chance to revisit some old memories. All of these *Chainsaw* legends enjoyed coming back: Marilyn was great, Bill Moseley was fantastic - he's a friend of mine now - and John Dugan as the grandfather - he had a great time and was happy to be asked to get involved. I think it all adds some continuity to this sequel and, you know, it was just great to be the guy who brought the family back together [laughs].

**Did you ever check out the other sequels in the *Chainsaw* franchise?**

No, other than part two the only one I have seen is the remake which Michael Bay produced.

**Were you a fan of the horror genre before you began making this movie?**

Well it is interesting because, like I said, this was really my journey into horror. But I have always had some personal favourites - I mean, I have always loved *The Omen*, *The Shining* and *The Exorcist*. But I really had to go back and watch a lot of horror movies for the first time and do some homework [laughs]. What stood out for me, from going through a lot of older classics and also the pick of today's movies, that you can really put your own quirkiness in this genre...

**Can you speak about some of the films you went back and viewed?**

Sure, well I looked at Rob Zombie's stuff and also Eli Roth's work. I caught up with the original *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* too. I mean, out of everything, I still think the first *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is elevated from those. I understand why those other movies work so well - and obviously Rob Zombie has been especially influenced by *Chainsaw* - but Tobe's film is just much more innovative. I enjoy horror films and I'm certainly a much



**Right:** Scenes from the new *Texas Chainsaw 3D* - which emerged a box office winner in the USA when released recently. Expect a sequel soon.



bigger fan of the medium now than I ever was before – like I said, you can put so much of yourself in there...

**How gruesome will your sequel be given that the original relied entirely on what you don't see - something the other instalments have diverted from?**

This is one of those horror movies where less is definitely more. I got calls from my friends when they knew I was making this. They all said, 'Hey John, can I be in this? I really want to be a victim and get destroyed by Leatherface!' But that is not what we do in this film. So, sadly, I had to turn them down [laughs].

**Can you speak about some of the violence? Should we expect more meat hooks and sledgehammers?**

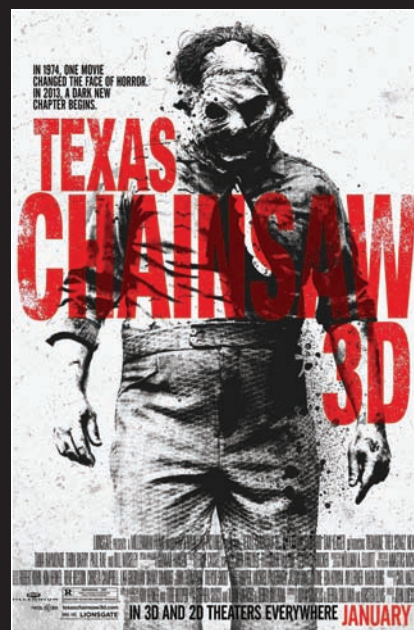
Well I don't want to give too much away but let me say this: we decided that each kill should be singular and really stand out in your mind. What impresses me is how imaginative a horror movie murder is. As the filmmaker you want to surprise your audience and not telegraph things because that takes out the fun element. That was the big challenge here. I am happy with each kill in this film – all of them are different, all of them are distinct and each one catches you off guard. Tobe's original was totally unabashed. For instance, when the guy gets the sledgehammer to the head, he held his camera there and didn't let it leave the scene...

**Exactly, it's a really brutal and powerful scene...**

Yeah, you see the guy get hit and then you see him fall down and start to contract but without any cutaway. So we go for the same sort of effect. We came from the direction of 'Sure, you can keep your hand over your face but you might not have time because a lot of this is going to be quite sudden'







[laughs]. Tobe's film was like that too. So we have tried not to over edit any of this. We want to keep the reality of the film intact.

**I saw the trailer and, have to say it, the characters looked like spoiled rich kids - all six packs and Playboy Playmate bodies. Should we sympathise with them?**

Well, I can certainly say that they are not like that in the actual film. I don't think rich kids will see this movie so we didn't play to that element at all. These are today's kids, placed in a bad situation [laughs]. I think you will feel for them and emphasise with them.

**So we won't be cheering for them to die?**

When I spoke to Kim Henkel - the co-writer of the original movie - he said that the first film was about 'something bad happening to those people who have violated the code of the universe.' So, in that sense, we do give some of the characters little quirks which at least condone their demise - although you won't be relishing how they go [laughs].

**Finally, then, the 1990 sequel Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III was shot in California and not Texas. As such it was roundly criticised for failing to capture the Lone Star State atmosphere of the first two films. Did you face this challenge given you also did not**

**Above:**  
Today's *Texas Chainsaw* heroines do more than scream - they fight back!

**shoot in Texas?**

I shot our movie in Louisiana - which is only 20 miles from Texas. So it is Texas terrain. There were no soundstages or sets involved in this - we shot out in the great wide open. When I went back to Tobe's original film I enjoyed seeing how the camera would sit in a van - or shoot through windows - and we tried to keep that sort of innovation.

That is what added to the documentary feel of the first film and we wanted to recapture some of that. Production wise it was tough to keep that sort of direction - especially because we were filming with two huge 3D cameras - but we managed to get through it and I am very proud of the results.

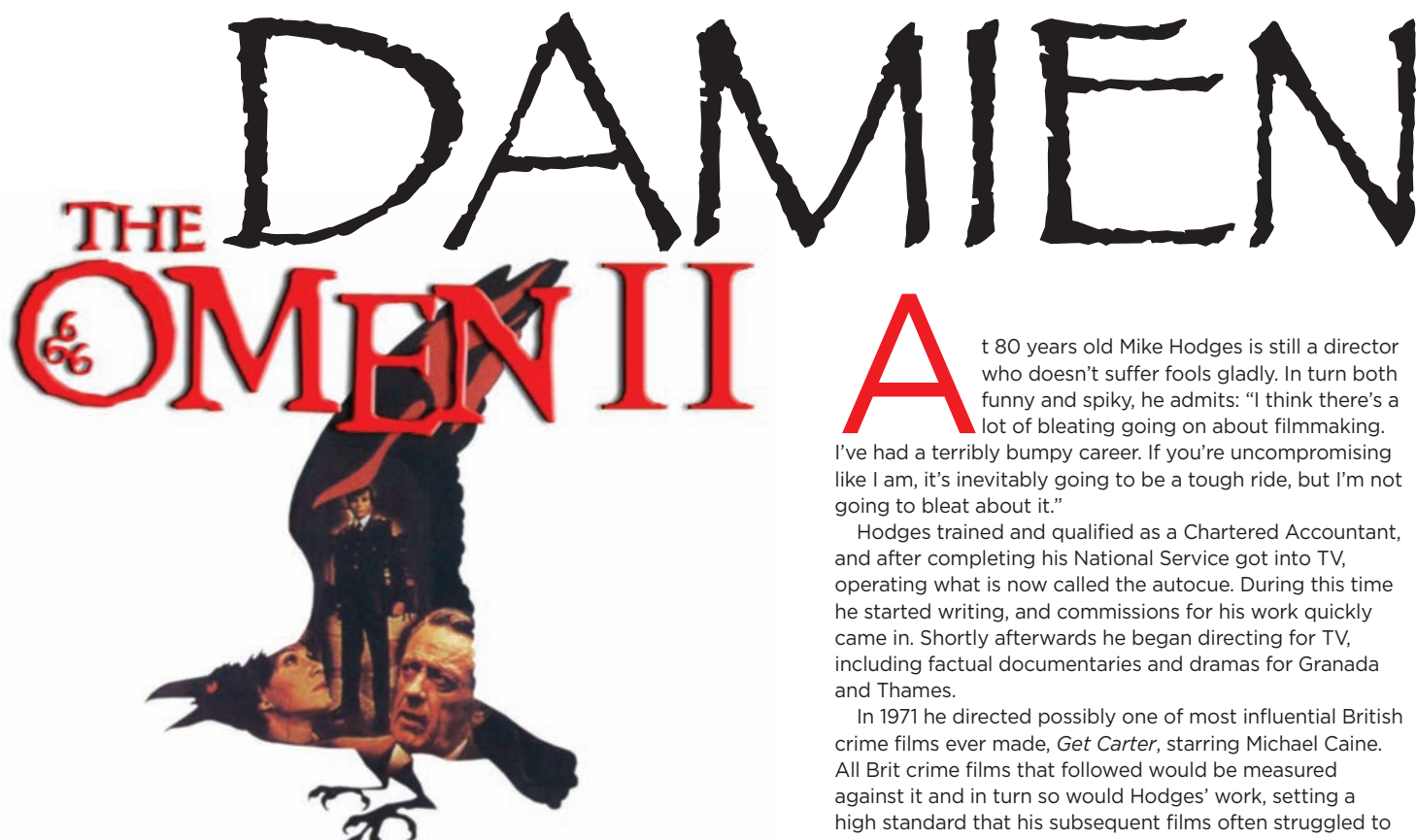


Opposite:  
cap in here  
Allan



Director Mike Hodges was the original director of *Damien: Omen II*, but left after the producer allegedly threatened him with a loaded gun. Simon Hooper talks to the him about the movie and his turbulent career

# WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT



**A**t 80 years old Mike Hodges is still a director who doesn't suffer fools gladly. In turn both funny and spiky, he admits: "I think there's a lot of bleating going on about filmmaking. I've had a terribly bumpy career. If you're uncompromising like I am, it's inevitably going to be a tough ride, but I'm not going to bleat about it."

Hodges trained and qualified as a Chartered Accountant, and after completing his National Service got into TV, operating what is now called the autocue. During this time he started writing, and commissions for his work quickly came in. Shortly afterwards he began directing for TV, including factual documentaries and dramas for Granada and Thames.

In 1971 he directed possibly one of most influential British crime films ever made, *Get Carter*, starring Michael Caine. All Brit crime films that followed would be measured against it and in turn so would Hodges' work, setting a high standard that his subsequent films often struggled to match.

It's his perfectionism and self admitted unwillingness to compromise that has epitomised his work. At best the





filmmaking process can be problematic, at worst it can be a complete nightmare, and Hodges has had more than his fair share of troublesome productions. ‘

*A Prayer for the Dying* was so beset with difficulties that both Hodges and its star Mickey Rourke effectively disowned it. A 2-part TV drama, *The Healer*, found Hodges working from a script by G.F. Newman, an avowed vegan, who insisted on catering for the crew being the same - forcing a disgruntled crew to sully their morning fry ups with vegetarian bacon for the duration of the shoot.

But it is perhaps the sequel to 1976's massively successful *The Omen*, the imaginatively titled *Damien: Omen II*, that proved most problematic for him.

He'd been offered the original *Omen* along with William Holden and both had turned it down. Holden, seeing the opportunity that he'd missed, was keen to be in the high profile sequel and accepted the role.

Hodges feature films, having started with the gritty *Get Carter*, had got darker. After *Carter* he directed *Pulp*, starring Mickey Rooney, which whilst on the surface appeared light hid a dark heart.

This was followed by *The Terminal man*, a film based on the late Michael Crichton's novel and adapted by Hodges, about a man trying to cure his violent seizures by having nanotechnology inserted into his brain only to find himself now enjoying the violence. It would seem, therefore, to be a natural progression for him to direct *Omen II* and

**Right and below:**

Scenes from *Damien: Omen II*, with Elizabeth Shepherd (bottom) being menaced by a devil crow.





continue in the same dark vein.

*Omen II's* producer was Harvey Bernard who produced the original film and was keen to secure key contributors to the first film's success. However *The Omen's* original director, Richard Donner, was now heavily involved with *Superman*. Having secured Jerry Goldsmith to continue his menacing score, Bernard was also keen to get its original screenwriter, David Seltzer. However Seltzer refused point blank, telling Bernard he had no interest whatsoever in writing sequels.

That said, many years later he admitted that if he had written the sequel it would have carried on directly where the first one left off with Damien now living in the White House. But it was not to be and it was Bernard himself who wrote the story outline, with Stanley Mann hired to flesh it out.

At the same time Hodges was approached: "I was offered the film based on a synopsis - the politics of which appealed to me," he later said, and the script's subtext of corporations abusing their power greatly appealed to him. Holden was one of Hodges' favourite actors and with both on board all was set for an equally successful sequel. It was never to be. "The film kept being delayed," said a clearly still exasperated Hodges. "During this period



I rewrote the script."

By all accounts there were disagreements over many aspects of the film, and the uncompromising director locked horns with Bernard one day in the producer's office. The argument centred around the design budget with the allegedly neurotic producer finally losing it and suddenly whipping out a handgun from a bag and purposefully placing it on the table between them.

An awkward silence followed as they looked at one another, before the director enquired if the gun was loaded. It was. The incident was enough to unsettle and scare Hodges and epitomised the increasingly threatening atmosphere on the film. Even now, over thirty years later, he is reluctant to talk about the incident, saying, "That's a tired story and irrelevant to my leaving the film."

From here things were to go downhill rapidly, and after three weeks shooting in Chicago Hodges left. "I don't think I was ever truly happy with this project. The constant delays concerned me from the beginning."

It became clear to Bernard that Hodges was not making the type of sequel he was after – rumours abound that he was not shooting quickly enough, and Don Taylor who was known for his workmanlike approach and bringing in films under budget was hired instead. But Taylor's work lacked Hodges' imaginative touch. Whereas Hodges would construct interesting frame compositions such as introducing Damien with a bonfire blazing away in front of him – his satanic origins made clear, Taylor seemingly just plonked the camera down and let the action just happen. The film went onto moderate success – its main criticisms being the pedestrian direction and Damien not being anywhere near as frightening as a teenager as when he was a 5 year old – though Sam Neill picked up the mantle admirably in 1981's *The Final Conflict*.

But all this was insignificant to Mike Hodges. "I was glad to escape it" he admits, and had no regrets whatsoever about leaving the film.

Since then, by his own admission, Hodges career has been "bumpy." He went onto direct the daft but fun *Flash Gordon*, then a few plays, and then the Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones comedy, *Morons from outer Space*, which really was moronic. "That's the way it panned out," he says with a shrug. It seems that perfectionism takes its toll. "Being a film maker in the UK, it's not easy to have continuity. When I wasn't able to make serious films I made delightfully silly ones."

There followed a return to form with the excellent *Black Rainbow*, starring Patricia Arquette. This was quite a left field film to make after such a



broad comedy. "That came from my personal experiences of North Carolina while shooting another film there," he explained. This return to form continued

with the well received Clive Owen duo of *Croupier* and *I'll sleep When I'm Dead* – again not without their behind-the-scenes problems, primarily with distribution in the US which was probably to blame for them failing to find an audience despite being critically acclaimed.

In the noughties he co-directed an insightful documentary about Hollywood serial killers, *Murder by Numbers*. The fanbase that he undoubtedly has wants to see him behind the camera directing a feature again but this remains in doubt.

It's clear that *Omen II* was a far from happy experience for him, and he tells *Dark Side* that, "I don't really want to go over an experience as negative as that one (again)."

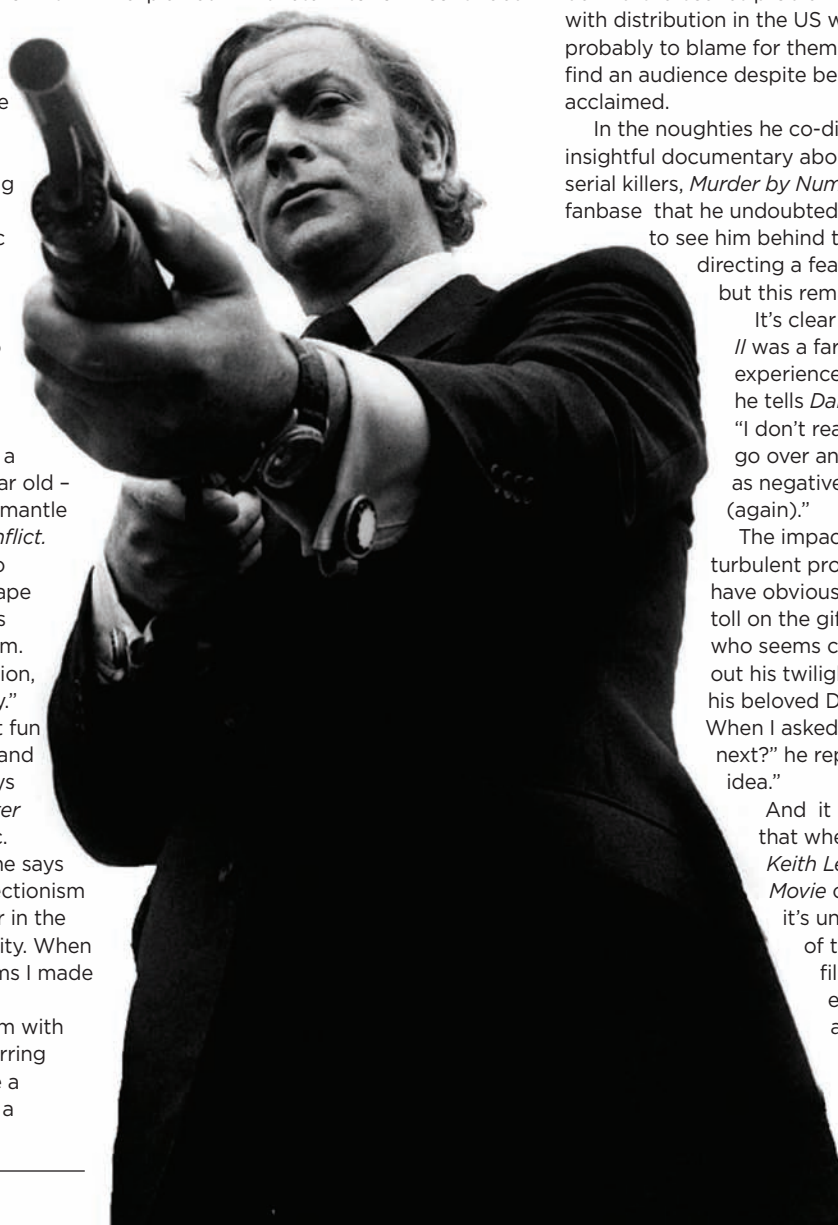
The impact of so many turbulent productions have obviously taken their toll on the gifted director, who seems content to live out his twilight years on his beloved Dorset farm. When I asked him, "What's next?" he replied, "No idea."

And it is depressing that when a film like *Keith Lemon: The Movie* can get made it's unclear if one of the UK's great filmmakers will ever direct again.

#### Above:

Ming and his daughter. "Flash, he'll save every one of us." Well it's the world's best household cleaner.

Left: "You're a big man but you're out of shape, with me it's a full time job. So behave yourself." Get Carter before Stallone ruined it.







# Feathered

MR. HITCHCOCK





# Friends

Simon Hooper looks at the making  
of *The Birds*, Hitchcock's only  
monster movie...



**A**lfred Hitchcock had long been acknowledged as a master of cinematic suspense, but the huge success of *Psycho* had gained him a new label as a master of horror too. Shot on a budget more suited to a TV production, *Psycho* had gone on to become the most profitable film he'd ever made. It was also to be the last film he would make for 3 years - the longest he'd ever gone between projects.

Ideas came and went until finally he settled on a Daphne Du Maurier short story, *The Birds*. He'd filmed her books twice before, gaining huge acclaim for *Rebecca* and less for *Jamaica Inn*.

In the summer of 1961 there had been a spate of unexplained bird attacks, notably in Monterey Bay where thousands of seagulls flew headlong into houses in some bizarre kind of avian suicide pact. Scientists eventually found that the birds had been nerve damaged by a toxin that had contaminated their diet of anchovies and squid. The effect on the food chain was the birds suffering some kind of seizure or confusion.

It was enough to spike Hitchcock's interest. He spoke to his production designer Robert Boyle, who had worked on *North by Northwest*, about what would clearly be the film's biggest problem: How do you get birds to do what you want on screen?

CGI was decades away and blue screen, though in its infancy, was not to the standard that he wanted. Bizarrely it was Disney who would ultimately provide the solution with their sodium back light process - one that didn't produce the hazy blue halo around actors' hair that other techniques did. It was a cumbersome process but one that Hitchcock liked.

Hitchcock still retained his interest in experimentation and this extended to the film's music score. Remi Gassman, a German composer, came to Hitchcock's attention with his electronic scores and so he travelled to Berlin with his regular composer Bernard Herrman, who ended up advising Gassman on the electronic score that was ultimately used.

Hitchcock had originally intended the shower scene in *Psycho* to feature just the sound of water, and his love of experimenting with sound can be traced right back to both his and the UK's first sound film, *Blackmail*, right through to his penultimate film, *Frenzy*.

Hitchcock's frequently employed bird imagery throughout his films to represent chaos and/or anxiety (*Blackmail*, *The Lady Vanishes*, *Saboteur*, *Vertigo* and later on in *Marnie* and *Topaz*) and here it was to come to a head. It was the idea of the birds themselves that intrigued Hitchcock more than Du Maurier's story, which was translated very loosely



by screenwriter Evan Hunter (more commonly known as the crime writer Ed McBain).

Hunter treated the first act as a light comedy, an approach that Hitchcock loved, as he wanted to wrong foot the audience much as he had with *Psycho*, where he'd killed off the main character early on.

Society woman Tippi Hedren and city lawyer Rod Taylor were the typically mismatched screwball couple and the attacks by the birds came at wholly unexpected moments. The first attack comes as Tippi Hedren rows across the bay and a seagull swoops down on her completely out of the blue.

Hitchcock famously storyboarded his movies so scrupulously that in his mind the actual filming process was a bit of an afterthought. He also hated location filming and preferred the studio where he could control all the elements. The first bird attack was shot there with Hedren sitting in the mock up boat against back-projected water and a model seagull attached to a wire sitting in the studio rafters. Hedren had a tube of air running up and through her hair that the makeup department had sprayed solid - apart from one lock. As the seagull swung down on its wire towards her, air was pumped through the tube blowing the lock of hair upwards just as the seagull made contact. It was one of hundreds of effects employed throughout the film.

As already mentioned, Hitchcock far preferred the preparation of a film than the actual shooting of it, and he pored over the script, not wanting to make the actors secondary to the birds themselves. Though Hunter was credited with the screenplay there was also input from the British fiction writer V.S. Pritchett as well as actor Hume Cronyn (whose wife Jessica Tandy was cast in the film). Cronyn had been involved in the writing of two previous Hitchcock films: *Rope* and *Under Capricorn*.

In the end, little was used from the book - names and the locale were

changed, themes were altered and the ending especially was completely different. It became almost Kafkaesque in its presentation of humans losing power and control in the face of an almost apocalyptic force of nature. There was to be no satisfactory explanation for the birds' behaviour and a scene to explain why they behaved so was dropped early on.

There is one brilliantly constructed and much imitated scene in a diner where each person attempts to rationalise the bird attacks. One thinks it's the end of the world, another calls Hedren a witch who has bought a curse on the town, and another equates it with Communism, demanding that they all be shot. At the same time Hitchcock's sly humour has two children eating chicken whilst asking their mother, 'Are the birds going to eat us mommy?'

His ironic sense of humour can be seen throughout the script. At one point a character asks, 'May I bring the lovebirds? They haven't harmed anyone?' and yet the birds in the film that carry out the attacks aren't birds of prey they're generally those which are common to any garden or coastline.

When preparing the script in his office at Universal, Hitchcock had made charts plotting the rise and fall in the action in an effort to supply some calm before the storm so that the audience could not anticipate the attacks.

It's well documented that this was Tippi Hedren's first feature film. First choice had been Grace Kelly who was now otherwise engaged in Monaco and would never be returning to the world of film again much to the director's dismay. So the hunt was on for a new lead. Several notable actresses of the time were considered including Pamela Tiffin, Yvette Mimieux, Carol Lynley and even Sandra Dee! But years later Hitchcock admitted to Francois Truffaut that as a further challenge he wanted to take an unknown girl and teach her how to act. For him an established actress would have to









**Above:**  
Never work  
with children,  
animals,  
or Alfred  
Hitchcock.  
**Opposite page:**  
Hitch and Tippi  
Hedren.

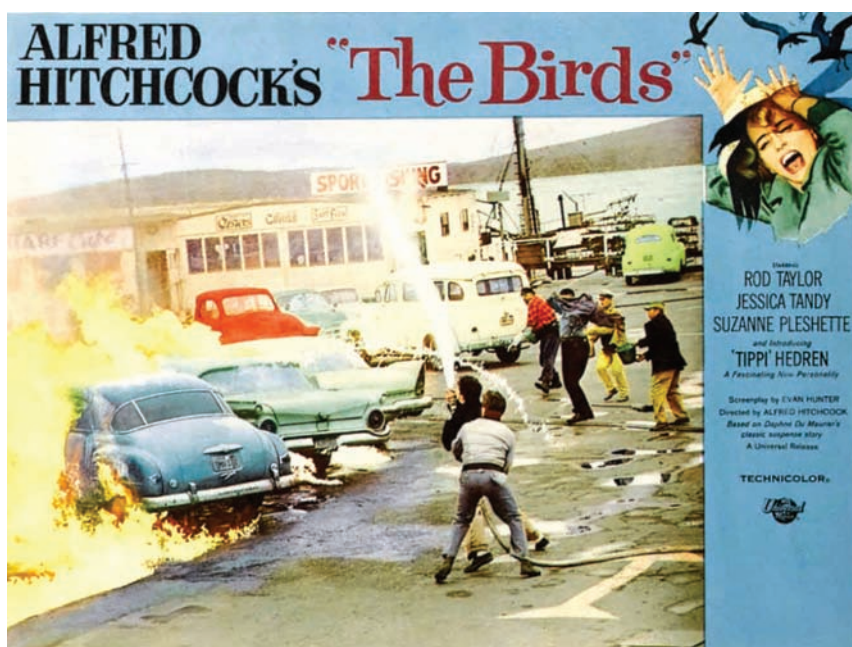
'unlearn' things to get the performance he wanted.

At the time, Tippi Hedren was a model who knew her career was slowly on the wane until Hitch saw her in a commercial for a diet product. She was the typical ice cool blonde and Universal asked her to attend the studio to discuss the film without telling her who the director would be. Having left her model portfolio there, she returned a few days later to pick them up only to be told to meet an agent at the studio. It was some time before she was told who was directing, and even then was under the impression it was for a part in his TV series, which had been running for the past few years.

Hedren shot three screen tests for Hitchcock, playing scenes from *Notorious*, *Rebecca* and *To Catch a Thief*, playing opposite *Psycho*'s murdered private detective, Martin Balsam, who'd been specially flown in from New York to shoot the scenes which the renowned DoP and longtime Hitchcock collaborator, Robert Burks, was lighting.

By all accounts Hitchcock took her completely under his wing, and when they met they never really talked about the film, choosing instead to discuss food, travel, wine and such like. She regularly went to his home for dinner, and it was during one meal that she was presented with a small box containing a brooch with three birds on it. Hitchcock told Hedren that he and his wife Alma wanted her to have the part. She burst into tears, overwhelmed with getting her first lead acting role. Lew Wasserman, the steely-eyed agent, who was present at the dinner, was rumoured to have been somewhat watery eyed too.

From here on in she was given a crash course in filmmaking by the auteur, who actively encouraged her to attend his meetings with heads of Department regardless of it being the DoP, production designer, writer or the



formidable costume designer Edith Head. Nothing was out of bounds when it came to her education in film.

Australian actor Rod Taylor, with his matinee idol good looks, got a call out of the blue asking him to play the male lead. Unlike Hedren he took it all in his stride, while apparently saying all the wrong things. He called the director 'Alfred' rather than his infinitely preferred moniker, 'Hitch'. Neither of the leads had any rehearsal time, not meeting until they were ready to film.

And so filming began. On location the natural lighting, background sound and the weather were just some of the things that a crew couldn't always control and Hitchcock returned with the crew to his preferred Universal Studios backlot whenever possible.

The old adage 'never work with children or animals' was never going to be possible on this film, and it was to

be the cause of numerous challenges, disruptions and out and out frustration. The team of animal wranglers was headed up by the gentlemanly Ray Berwick, who'd worked on *The Birdman of Alcatraz*, and taught many of the real life birds individually.

He said the rest of his team grew increasingly bad tempered with the real birds. Training some of the birds to do certain things on cue was good for the film, but it meant that they could not be released into the wild having learnt all manner of bad habits from pecking at hands and worse. Berwick had his own pet raven called 'Buddy' who was so 'house trained' that he couldn't be used for many of the more intense and savage sequences.

Although it's well documented what a tough shoot it was for Hedren, many of the birds didn't fare much better themselves. A female member of the



crew became very protective of them, insisting that an aviary was built for those that had been hurt or injured so she could look after them. The Humane Society were present throughout filming and at 5pm each day they ordered Hitchcock to stop using the birds, fearing they would be tired.

Despite this, the animals went through some extraordinary ordeals to achieve the desired effects. Seagulls had their beaks taped up to prevent injury to cast and crew alike – although one got free and was chased down a beach by one of the wranglers. For one exterior shot of a building covered in birds the production designer came up with the idea of putting magnets on their feet so they would stick to the metal guttering, only to find the animals hanging upside down, having tried unsuccessfully to fly away!

Perhaps the worst ordeal for both birds and especially Hedren was the attack in the attic. From the start she had been told that mechanical birds would be used on the day, and it was an extremely reluctant 1st Assistant Director who went to her dressing room and, unable to look her in the eye, broke the news that the mechanical ones didn't work – so they'd be using the real thing.

Due to this, the set itself was encased in a huge cage to prevent the birds escaping. With Hedren sat in the middle of it, all the bird wranglers, wearing metal gauntlets up to their shoulders, would then proceed to hurl live birds from 3 large boxes at her. This went on hour after hour, for five days. Hedren later described it as the, 'worst week of my life'.

Cary Grant, on visiting the set, commented on how brave she was, and it's unlikely that an experienced actress would have put up with it or even have agreed to it in the first place. It was to get worse. Tied around her legs, arms and torso was elastic, with nylon thread in turn tied to one leg of each bird so they were unable to fly away. They bounced back at her, flapping ever more furiously in their attempt to free themselves.

Inevitably a bird scratched her perilously close to her eye. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. Physically and mentally exhausted, Hedren broke down in tears and was put under doctor's orders to rest for a week. The scene where Taylor carries Hedren in his arms down the stairs actually utilizes a double, filmed as the actress lay at home in bed recovering. The psychological toll the scene had taken on her remained even when she eventually returned to set. To finish the scene she went to make up to have all the peck marks and scratches applied to her face but when it was all done she took one look in the mirror, rushed out and threw up!

This wasn't the first time she'd been injured on set. In one earlier scene where she cowers in a phone booth the glass was meant to be shatterproof. A dummy





**Right:**  
Hitch on set  
filming the  
final scenes,  
instructing Rod  
Taylor, Tippi  
Hedren and  
rather a lot of  
birds.



seagull was to prove otherwise as it careered headlong into it shattering the glass panel on impact and spraying tiny glass shards over her face that took the rest of the afternoon to be plucked out. The scene remains in the film.

Even Rod Taylor didn't escape. One of the ravens called 'Archie' took a dislike to him pecking at him whenever possible. Taylor became increasingly wary of entering the studio, where the bird would lie in wait up in the rafters before swooping down on him. There's a scene

towards the end of the film where Taylor leaves the house and the bird perched on the porch pecks at him. It's Archie.

The trouble with the real life birds continued when the birds swarmed down the chimney into the house. For this scene Hitchcock orchestrated the tension on the set for the actors by getting a drummer to slowly increase the rate and volume of his beating, quicker and quicker, louder and louder. Again the whole set was enclosed, this time with netting. It was a scene which could not

really be rehearsed, and so on 'Action!' the hundreds of finches used for the scene were released down the chimney into the set - only to quite happily find perches for themselves and just sit there. A large fan was used to try and get them moving about, but all it did was make the actors' hair fly around as if they were in wind tunnel. In the end what you see in the film is the actors pretending to be under attack on a finch-free set and the birds were added later in postproduction. Another scene, where the school



children flee from the attacking crows, ended up being completed in the studio where they all ran on treadmills against a sodium screen back ground for the effects to be put in later. This worked until the child at the front of the treadmill fell over and was whisked backwards, bowling over anyone behind them. Consequently the children began arguing about who should now run at the front.

It is one of the standout set pieces, starting with the birds slowly gathering on the climbing frame in the background behind Hedren before amassing in their hundreds to attack. It's a clever illusion, as only a handful of actual live birds were put in to draw the eye away from the others, which if you look carefully you will see are either stuffed or cardboard cut outs. This was one of a number of tricks used throughout the film, which included putting food near the camera lens to get the birds to fly directly at the audience. These basic and essentially inexpensive effects were used regularly throughout, including one scene where the birds attempt to peck their way through a door. This was achieved by attaching dummy birds beaks to the heads of hammers and the scene crew battering a flimsy door with them as they were filmed from the other side.

Another one of cinema's unsung heroes also worked on the film – the matte painting artist Albert Whitlock. So good was his work that his paintings were often mistaken for photographs and were even used for the horrific eyeless corpse. This was partly achieved by the make up dept who built up the actor's cheeks with wax and Whitlock's matte shot made the eye sockets hollow and empty. His work on the film is peerless and one of the most notable scenes is used in what Hitchcock called the 'God's eye view' of the town under attack by the seagulls as the locals hide in the nearby diner.

It was a complicated shot, and because the camera negative itself had to be used to achieve the matte shot, Whitlock only had one opportunity to get it right. The centre of the shot shows the carnage as the petrol catches fire from the car that was filling up. The surrounding area of the high angle wide shot is Whitlock's matte painting. The seagulls flying above the scene were shot elsewhere using strategically placed food for them to dive down on as they were filmed. Each of these birds had to be rotoscoped, which meant isolating them from the background of each frame before they too could be incorporated into the 'God's eye view' shot. This one shot gives an indication of just how complex the film was in a time before CGI was commonplace.

In all the film used 371 trick shots, including the famous last scene which, incredibly, is made up of 32 pieces of film. There were only a handful of birds available but by carefully placing the birds in specific areas and exposing that

part of the negative, as well as using yet another of Whitlock's matte paintings, the landscape appeared to be covered by the avian enemy.

In all the film had 1400 shots, more than twice that of any other previous film of Hitchcock's up to that time, and was a phenomenal technical accomplishment film. Ironically these process shots, which were generally scenes of savagery, were farmed out to Disney studios who at the time led the field in this area.

Ever the showman, Hitchcock, as a publicity stunt, made the entire crew swear not to give the ending away. The truth was that no one knew what the ending would be, and it was the source of much speculation on set. In Hunter's original script they slowly drive through the town that has been decimated by the attacks, only to find themselves under attack from the birds before finally managing to drive off at speed and escape. It was never shot possibly because it would have been too difficult but, more likely, too time consuming.

Hitchcock told Peter Bogdanovich that one ending that had been contemplated was Taylor and Hedren driving to the Golden Gate Bridge only to find their escape route covered in tens of thousands of birds. Instead we have the ending that left audiences both confused and disappointed. There was to be no explanation for the birds' behaviour. Neither was there to be a climatic sequence of Man v Birds. Instead we have a low-key drive off into the sunset. It was only the studio's insistence that the Universal logo faded in that gave the audience the clue that the film had actually finished. No credits. Nothing. Just a logo.

On its release, critics found little continuity with Hitchcock's previous work. *The New Yorker* called it 'a sorry failure' and *Newsweek* criticised the central idea as being 'inexpertly handled'. Evan Hunter was unhappy with the finished film. In Patrick McGilligan's biography, *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light*, he alleged that, 'Hitch took outrageous liberties with what I had written... he juggled scenes, cut scenes and even added one scene.' (believed to be one between Taylor and Hedren at the birthday party).

Despite that, Hunter was nominated in 1964 for an Edgar Allan Poe award. The film was another big success for Hitchcock, becoming one of the biggest films of 1963, though not on a par with *Psycho*, garnering the film a sole Academy Award nomination for Ub Iwerks' special effects but ultimately losing out to *Cleopatra*, one of the most expensive flops ever made.

Hedren, though derided for her performance, did actually win a Golden Globe for 'Best Newcomer,' vindicating Hitch's casting decision. With his new star he went on to make *Marnie*, a less than successful attempt at a psychological thriller with the fledgling

Bond actor Sean Connery. But after the success of *The Birds* there began a dry spell for the revered director as his next three films, with *Topaz* and *Torn Curtain*, both critical and commercial failures. It would be 1973 before he had another hit with the London-based thriller, *Frenzy*.

Weak ending aside, *The Birds* still remains an interesting film and was Hitchcock's only 'Monster' movie, providing like so many of his other films inspiration for future generation of directors.

Inevitably a sequel imaginatively titled, *The Birds 2*, flapped on to the screen in 1994, with a cameo by Hedren, although not as her character in the original. It couldn't save a film so dismal that its director disowned it, leaving it with the ubiquitous Alan Smithee director credit.

For no explicable reason, *Psycho* was remade shot for shot in 1998 by Gus Van Sant and garnered mixed reviews. *The Birds* has also been up for the remake treatment. Martin Campbell (*Goldeneye*) was rumoured to be directing at first, but there were problems with the script and Michael Bay, who'd also been in the frame to helm it, was unable to see beyond birds' ability to peck and poo. Which is as much as you'd expect from a director who has made a fortune from giant robots smashing up US cities.

Whilst not having the critical kudos of *Vertigo*, *The Birds* remains a firm favourite with the public, and with the upcoming Bio-pic, *Hitchcock*, featuring Anthony Hopkins as the lugubrious director they've even included a knowing nod to *The Birds* at the end as one of his feathered friends lands on him. The TV movie *The Girl*, screened this Christmas, also featured the making of *The Birds*, with Sienna Miller playing Tippi Hedren.

*Hitchcock 3D* opens on February 8th  
*Hitchcock* Blu-ray box set now available







# DEATH OF A SCHLOCK MERCHANT!

Legendary exploitation filmmaker Al Adamson was found cemented into his own jacuzzi! Could his brush with the Charles Manson gang have had anything to do with it?

**A**l Adamson was an unsung hero of the exploitation business, servicing the redneck drive-in crowd with a host of lurid, low-budget shockers such as *Vampire Men Of The Lost Planet*, *Horror Of The Blood Monsters* and *Blood Of Ghastly Horror*, and building a minor cult reputation in the process. By the mid-90s he had more or less retired from the movie biz, but he planned a comeback. In an interview with an American horror fanzine, he explained that he had a new project in mind, one that he was sure would make headlines.

Adamson made the front page all right, but not in the way he would have wished!

In August, 1995, police were called to his home in Indio, about 150 miles southeast of Los Angeles, where they made a grim discovery. The 66-year-old director hadn't been seen around for five weeks, and after interviewing witnesses and examining recent construction work, cops and forensic specialists took up the flooring in the bathroom. The director's corpse was buried there under four tons of cement. It had been dumped in a hole from which a Jacuzzi had been removed. His skull had been bashed in with a heavy object. The tabloid newspapers made much of Al's macabre demise. Looking into his colourful background they discovered links to organised crime and even the Charles Manson gang. Was he the victim of a contract "hit," or had one of Charlie's psychotic followers done a Sharon Tate on him?

## KENTUCKY FRIED CARNAGE

Albert Victor Adamson was born in 1929, the son of silent western star Denver

## They're MADMEN on MOTORCYCLES!

SEE –  
BARBARIC  
BRUTALITY!

FEMALE LOVE  
SLAVES!



SPECTACULAR ACTION!

HELL'S  
BLOODY  
DEVILS

ALL NEW!

ALL ACTION!

INDEPENDENT-INTERNATIONAL PRESENTS AN AL ADAMSON PRODUCTION

INTRODUCING  
**JOHN GABRIEL**  
**ANNE RANDALL**

STARRING  
**BRODERICK CRAWFORD • SCOTT BRADY • KENT TAYLOR**  
**ROBERT DIX • KEITH ANDES • JOHN CARRADINE**

CO-STARRING  
**JACK STARRETT • WILLIAM BONNER**

AND — The "WILD REBELLION GIRLS" —  
**ERIN O'DONNELL • VICKI VOLANTE • EMILY BANKS**  
**BAMBI ALLEN • JILL WOELFEL**

Featuring Daredevil BIKE RIDERS from California's "HESSIANS"

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY AL ADAMSON

MUSIC NELSON RIDDLE

SCREENPLAY BY JERRY EVANS

RELEASED BY INDEPENDENT-INTERNATIONAL PICTURES CORP.

GP ALL AGES ADMITTED  
Parental Guidance Suggested

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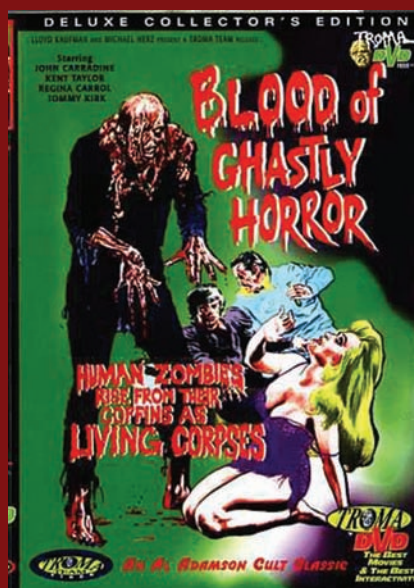
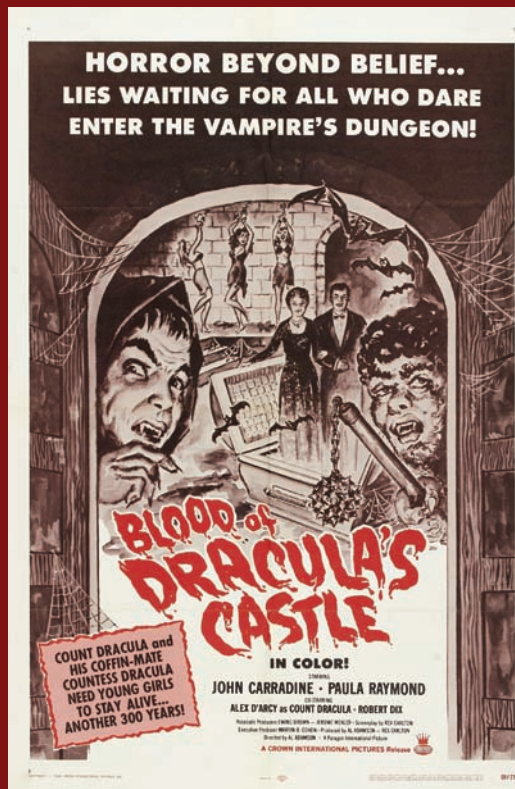


Dixon, who gave young Al a movie camera and set him off on a two decade career of churning out schlock. His first movie was a no-budget shocker called *Psycho-A-Go-Go*. Realising this made no sense whatsoever, he added new scenes featuring old horror stager John Carradine and the film was let loose on drive-in audiences as *The Fiend With The Electronic Brain*. It still made no sense.

Not long after this, Adamson fell into partnership with a would-be-tycoon named Rex Carlton, who stumped off the budget for *Blood Of Dracula's Castle*. Featuring a cut-price Drac who drinks the blood of young girls drained in syringes and served up in cocktail glasses, it was a modest success, but Carlton and Adamson were ripped off by the distributors. It turned out that Carlton had "borrowed" mob money" to finance the movie, and when he couldn't make the repayments he took a gun and blew his brains out. "He knew they'd have killed him anyway," said Adamson philosophically.

The following year he found safer funding for *Hell's Bloody Devils*, a violent biker flick that was one of several shot at the Spahn Ranch, where Charles Manson and his followers hung out before embarking on their late 60s murder spree. George Spahn was a friend of Adamson's father. Now he was blind, and Manson's hippies were looking after him. Always astute at finding ways to reduce a movie's budget, Adamson arranged for the cast and crew of *Hell's Bloody Devils* to gorge themselves on free *Kentucky Fried Chicken* - by the simple expedient of offering a cameo role to KFC boss Colonel Harlan Sanders!

Though Al could never have been accused of making a good film, he came closest with *Satan's Sadists*, a brutal 1969 biker flick that made big bucks on the grindhouse circuit. Booze-ridden *West Side Story* star Russ Tamblyn played the leader of the grime-stained

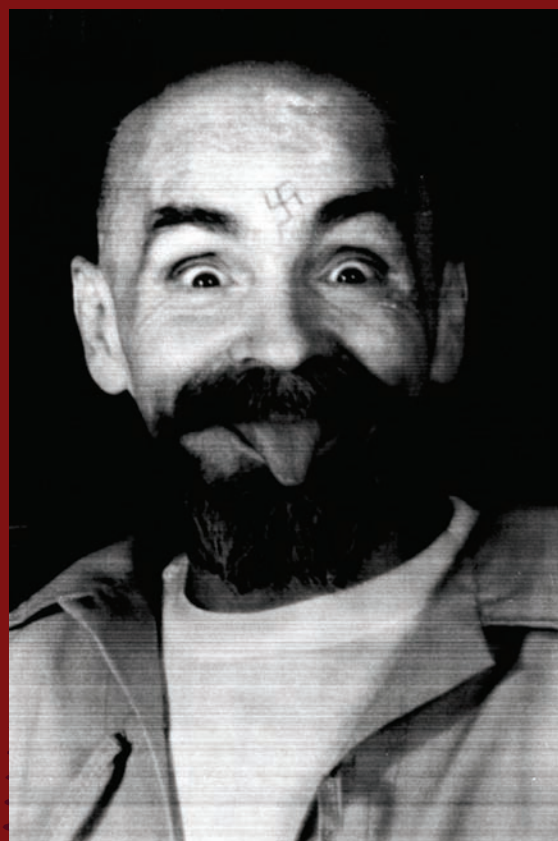


title bunch, raping, pillaging and sampling prohibited substances in their search for ever greater kicks. The film's theme song went, "By the time I was twelve I was killing, killing for Satan..."

While it was good to see former family entertainment icon Tamblyn debasing himself in so enthusiastic a fashion, a more significant bit of casting was that of busty blonde Regina Carroll as "The Freak Out Girl," the proverbial good time had by all. Regina first came to Al's attention when she spilled coffee over him in the restaurant where she was working as a waitress, and she later went on to do it at the breakfast table as well, becoming his wife.

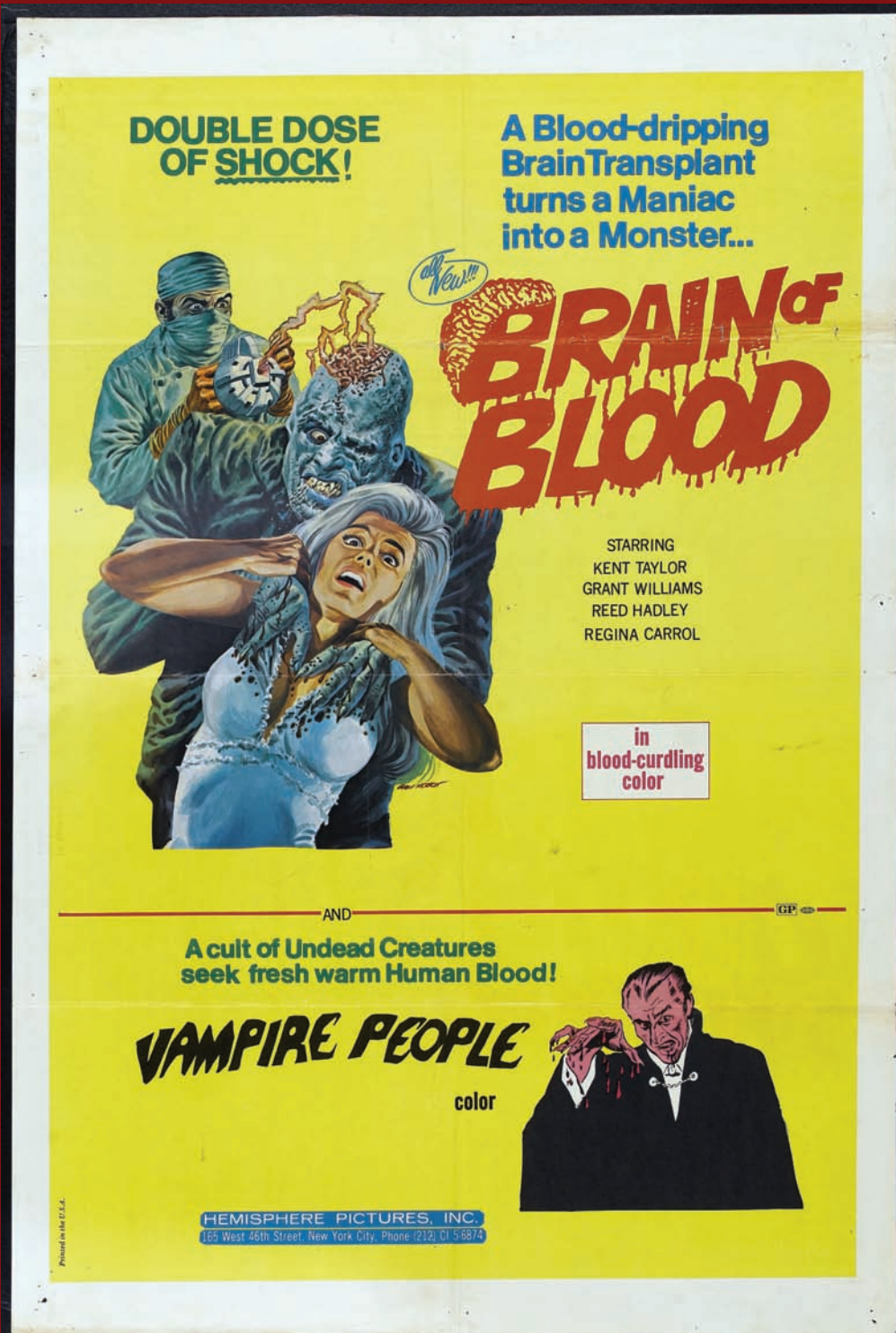
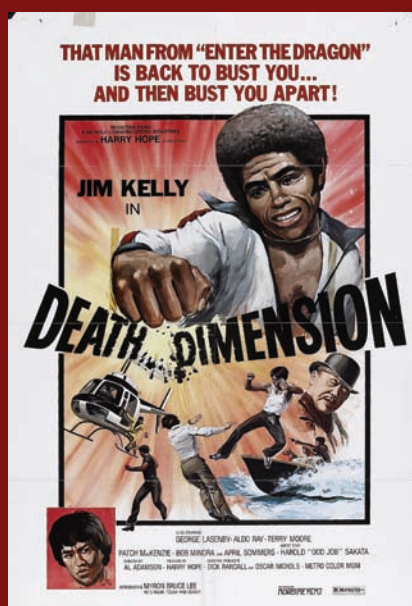
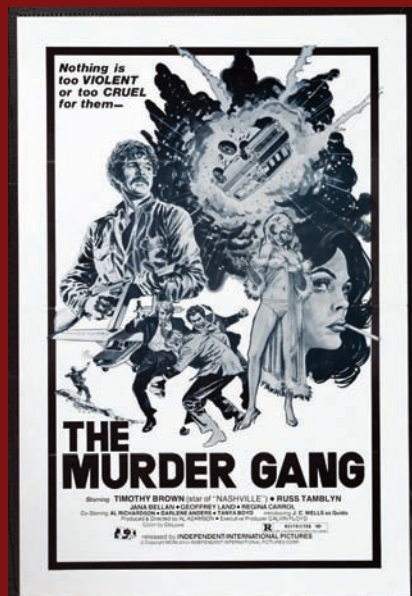
#### A BRUSH WITH MANSION

Adamson returned to the Spahn Ranch in 1968 to make *Lash Of Lust*, an adults-only sex western that concerned women



being kidnapped and abused. This time he actually came into contact with the bearded, Christ-like Manson, as Al reported in a later interview. "We were shooting a scene and Manson came over with three or four of his girls. I don't know if they were the ones that did the murders or not. Manson and his followers were ogling the naked actresses. His women were all taking their tops off and being a bit of a nuisance. In the end we had to physically throw them off the





set. It's hard for me to understand how people can follow a guy like that..."

Adamson was developing quite a following himself by now, and *Satan's Sadists* had proven a box office bonanza, grossing some \$20 million back when tickets were a dollar and a half! Going into partnership with old friend Sam Sherman, Adamson formed Independent International Productions and began churning out low-budget horror movies such as *Brain Of Blood*, *Horror Of The Blood Monsters* and *Dracula Vs. Frankenstein*, the latter featuring veteran horror actor (and boozier) Lon Chaney Jr in one of his final roles. Said Adamson, "Lon was very ill, and between every scene he'd do his vomiting and come right back to work. It wasn't drinking. He had cancer and he was fighting to stay alive."

Charles Manson was safely behind bars by the time Adamson made *Angels' Wild Women* in 1972. This movie was a deliberate attempt to capitalise on the Manson killings, and featured a brutal confrontation between bikers and psychotic hippies filmed where else but the Spahn Ranch. The bikers won, of course.

Other Adamson exploiters from around this time include *Blazing Stewardesses*, a western comedy rip-off of Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*, and *I Spit On Your Corpse*, a prison camp picture featuring porno actress Georgina Spelvin, who left the movie early after refusing to wade into a desert pool. "I don't mind being fucked on camera," she said, "but I'm damned if I'm gonna get myself dirty!"



# HOT, HARD AND MEAN...

TOO TOUGH FOR ANY MAN !!

They'll BEAT 'em, TREAT 'em and EAT 'em alive!



# ANGELS' WILD WOMEN

INDEPENDENT-INTERNATIONAL presents an AL ADAMSON Film starring  
**ROSS HAGEN KENT TAYLOR REGINA CARROL**  
and **PRESTON PIERCE—VICKI VOLANTE—JILL WOELFEL—WILLIAM BONNER**

Produced and Directed by  
AL ADAMSON

Executive Producers  
SAMUEL M. SHERMAN & DANIEL Q. KENNIS

**COLOR BY DELUXE**

Released by  
INDEPENDENT-INTERNATIONAL  
Pictures Corp.

**R** RESTRICTED—Persons under 16 not admitted  
unless accompanied by parent or adult guardian

## SOMETHING OUT OF A HORROR SCRIPT!

By the mid-70s the decline of the drive-in market caused Adamson to slow down and diversify his career. He shot a few black action movies and a sexy musical called *Cinderella 2000*. In 1981 he made his final movie, a misguided kiddie fantasy entitled *Carnival Magic*. The story of a 'cute' talking chimp, the film also marked the final screen appearance of Regina Carroll, who died of lung cancer in 1993 at the untimely age of 49. Having dabbled in the property business and opened successful restaurants in Utah and Santa Monica, Al was just on the verge of making a comeback, directing a UFO-themed sci-fi movie, when he was found murdered.

It didn't take the police long to track down Adamson's killer. It wasn't a berserk biker, one of Charles Manson's old cronies, or even a disgruntled viewer of one of the director's films. The culprit turned out to be beefy 50-year-old builder Fred Fulford, who had been



working as a general contractor helping Adamson remodel his home, and was actually living there at the time of the murder.

It seems that the two had a dispute

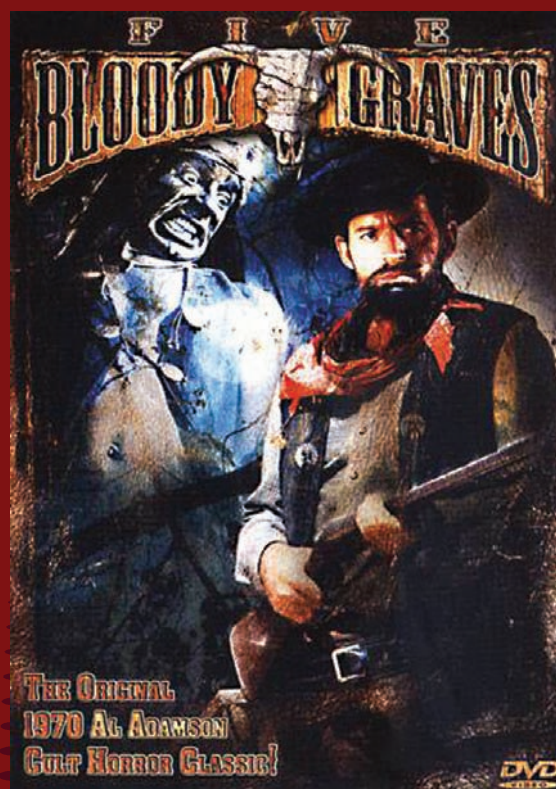
**Super  
Cool & Wild!!**  
Smashing the Man  
and the Mob  
for his Women!



An AMHERST presentation starring  
**CLIFTON BROWN DENNIS SAFREN LUCIANA PALUZZI**  
**LANG JEFFRIES TRACY KING**

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over money which ended with Fulford bashing Al's head in with a piece of pipe. After the killing, Fulford went to Florida and tried to sell several of Adamson's cars, at which point he was apprehended. Sentencing Fulford to 25 years to life in prison, Judge Graham Cribbs called the crime "cold-hearted and callous," going on to say, "It was like something out of a horror movie script." Very true, but there's also no denying the fact that it was a fitting end for a man who made so many truly weird films!



# DVD

## LIBRARY

The latest genre-related DVD and Blu-ray releases reviewed by the redoubtable **James Kloda** and our esteemed editor **Allan Bryce**



### THE ISLAND (1981) Blu-ray/DVD

**Out Now. Scream Factory/Shout! Factory**  
**www.movietyme.com** **Certificate: N/A**

Though drawn from a gory bestseller by Peter Benchley and adapted for the screen by the author himself, this potboiler of an adventure story failed to hit the same boxoffice heights as *Jaws*.

*The Island* stars Michael Caine as a British journalist who investigates the disappearance of a ship in the Bermuda Triangle and discovers a remote island inhabited by a gang of bloodthirsty pirates.

He's taken prisoner along with his young son, Jeffrey Frank, and the lad is brainwashed into joining the scurvy crew. Brattish Frank is so annoying that you'll wish they'd make him walk the plank! Poor old Caine has his eyes stretched with pegs, is stung by jellyfish and bled by leeches, but gets his own back cutting loose with a machine gun in the *Wild Bunch*-style finale.

This grim \$22 million B-movie was a box office loser, probably because Caine is badly miscast in the lead and seems disinterested in the proceedings for much of the time. He's certainly nowhere near as colourful as the pirate baddies, led by a compellingly nasty David Warner. Ennio Morricone wrote the impressive music score and the director was Michael Ritchie, better employed on more subtle and well-scripted movies like *The Candidate* and *Smile* - though my favourite Ritchie pic is the 'fairytale' Lee Marvin/Sissy Spacek gangster flick, *Prime Cut*.

The movie has been given a good 2.35:1 widescreen transfer, but this looks the same to us as the on-demand version that was put out on DVD Stateside a while back, with the HD upgrade offering a tad more detail.

**Extras:** Not much. A scrappy fullscreen trailer for *The Island* and two others, for *They Live* and *Death Valley*. **AB.**

### DEATH VALLEY (1982) Blu-ray/DVD

**Out Now. Scream Factory/Shout! Factory -**  
**www.movietyme.com. Certificate: N/A.**

Former photographer Dick Richards had a brief but interesting career as a director in the 70s, starting with the underrated western, *The Culpepper Cattle Company* in 1972 and continuing with the Lew Grade productions of *Farewell My Lovely* (1975) - his best picture - and the Gene Hackman Foreign Legion adventure, *March or Die* (1977). In fact Richards also produced the Dustin Hoffman hit, *Tootsie* and was in the running to direct *Jaws* but legend has it he was dropped from the project because he couldn't tell a shark from a whale!

Anyway, *Death Valley* is one of his latter day efforts, a slow-moving slasher movie with minimal and largely unconvincing gore. Though made in the early 80s it seems even more dated and would probably be rated PG by today's standards.

The narrative is told from the point of view of precocious young New York kid Billy (Peter Billingsley - later to find fame in Bob Clark's *A Christmas Story*). Billy reluctantly accompanies his newly divorced mother Sally (Catherine Hicks from *Child's Play*) to Arizona, to meet the new man in her life, her former high school sweetheart Mike (Paul Le Mat of *American Graffiti*).

Nice guy Mike tries in vain to get Billy to like him by taking the family on a tour of Death Valley and letting the youngster play pint-sized gunslinger and gun down tame bandits. While off exploring on his own, Billy stumbles across a seemingly deserted motor home. What we know and he doesn't is that the tourists on board have just been sliced and diced by a knife-wielding psycho and their bodies are stuffed in a back cupboard. Before Billy discovers them, however, Mike turns up to tell him not to be so nosy.

A sinister Cadillac with HEX as part of its licence plate is parked nearby, and a frog pendant which Billy pockets at the scene is another clue to the killings. When they stop for a burger at a local diner, Billy notices that waiter Stephen McHattie is wearing the same pendant. On their way back to their hotel, the family are held up on the road by cops hauling the charred remains of the motor home from a ditch. Billy tells the local sheriff, played by *The Thing*'s Wilford Brimley, about the pendant and the waiter, which sends the lawman off to visit the



man's remote home... with grisly consequences.

Writer Richard Rothstein was one of the mainstays of the Canadian horror series, *The Hitchhiker*. His script for this is very slow to get going and has plot holes sizeable enough to drive the aforementioned Cadillac through, but the movie does generate some tension in the later scenes when the suitably deranged McHattie stalks the meddlesome youngster and engages him in a gunfight that is far from pretend.

So good in *Pontypool* and *A History of Violence*, Canadian actor McHattie does his best to put more into his standard psycho role than was on the printed page of the script and as such he is easily the best thing in the movie. There's a fairly neat little twist at the end, by the way, though it's easy enough to guess if you put your mind to it.

One of the film's major assets is fine cinematography of interesting desert locations, and Scream Factory's strong 1.78:1 widescreen transfer showcases this well, although some sequences have the traditional 80s grainy feel.

**Extras:** Dick Richards supplies a pleasantly diverse audio commentary, describing the film's child hero as "a young kid with a forty-year-old brain." There's also a trailer and TV spot, plus trailers for *The Island* and *They Live*. **AB**



**COMEDOWN (2012) Blu-ray/DVD****Out Now. StudioCanal. Certificate: 15.**

You'd never believe there was a housing shortage in the UK right now if you were to look at all the horror movies involving empty highrises. Following hot on the heels of the superior *Tower Block*, *Comedown* is the latest from Menhaj Huda of *Kidulthood* fame and has the same gritty, streetwise feel. It was also a bit hard for a non-streetwise old git like me to follow what was being said at times, but then maybe I'm not the target audience.

The predictable storyline centres around a crew of South London teenagers kicking around the streets with nothing to do. Jason (Adam Deacon) is just out of prison for a minor offence and now wants to go straight and support his pregnant girlfriend Jemma (Sophie Stuckey).

Firebug Gal (Calm McNab) and wideboy Lloyd (Jacob Anderson) seem just as determined to put their mate back behind bars, while the rest of the gang is made up of gentle giant Col (Duane Henry) and chain-smoking party girl Kelly (Jessica Barden). A chance to make some quick cash and pharmaceuticals comes their way when they are approached by a local dealer who asks them to break into a derelict tower block to install a transmitter for a pirate radio station on the top floor. But when they do so, they discover the place is already inhabited - by



a lone maniac who has good reason for wanting bloody revenge on one of the crew. It is easy to work out who the disfigured killer is, his motives are a genre staple that stretches back to the *Friday the 13th* series and *The Burning*. Bearing that in mind, *Comedown* still manages to coast along on some suitably nasty - and inventive - gore scenes that really push the limit for a 15 certificate.

These are all the more effective because the characters getting splattered are more interesting than the bland American kids who were offed in the 80s models. Perhaps the most affecting of them is Duane Henry's kindly Col, who really doesn't deserve his grisly fate. The rest can be irritating at times but they are still well rounded and believable.

Though the ending is both disappointing and annoying, *Comedown* is still a cut above most modern day British genre flicks, mainly because it doesn't stint on the gore. A slow death by nailgun with some Fulci-style eye violence is a highlight, and the director makes good use of the maze-like dark corridors to keep the viewer on edge.

**Extras:** *Behind the scenes.* Extended interviews with selected cast and director. **AB.**

**ELF-MAN (2012) DVD****Out Now. Anchor Bay Certificate: U**

2012 was a strange year as recession cut ever deeper into our threadbare pockets, tensions in the Middle East continued to rise, and what little faith was left in the BBC became totally destroyed. But fear ye not, that time of year swiftly came upon us. On the chill wind, one could hear: "You better watch out/You better not cry/You better not pout/I'll tell you why..." No, you cold-hearted cynics, it was not a jingle sung by a certain disc jockey that Yew Tree had recently uncovered. Santa Claus, that miracle worker with a predilection for boys and girls, came to town! Your letter was only the start of it! Still shaking your heads with disbelief that so many pretend that such a man didn't exist? O, Broken Britain, let us continue to ring in some festive cheer, and allow *Elf-Man* to fix it for you. And you, and you...

Now then, now then, enough with the pessimism: we're talking about a family film here. When their daddy doesn't return home from a last-minute Christmas shop, moppets Kasey and Ryan fear their goose will never be cooked. Unbeknownst to them, Pops has been kidnapped by a trio of goons led by ex-Navy SEAL Jeffrey Combs who wants the super solar-powered microchip that he just invented.

But, whilst Santa was unloading his sack, a lowly underling turned away before finding, minutes later, that he has



been abandoned. Fortunately for the kids, this pointy-lugged elf is stranded in their house and may be able to grant them the greatest wish of all with his magical powers: reunite the happy family! Except he can't raise mum from the dead. Oh well, at least *Elf-Man* will have helped the world become more energy efficient and raised awareness about white-haired philanthropists sneaking into children's bedrooms.

Jokes aside, *Elf-Man* is actually a nifty

little comedy destined for minor cult status. There are neat modern gags (Claus navigates with a Bluetooth headset, the elves download present lists on tablets) and the action is cartoon-symphonic with zippy rhythm and slapstick violence. Despite the presence of Combs, bug-eyes relishing pantomime villainy, the appeal for the horror fan is in Ethan Wiley's genre-smart direction. Having scripted *House* and written/directed its charmingly daft, Harryhausen-inspired first sequel, outré elements such as a fruit-cake monster (reminiscent of the talking pizza in *House IV*) jostle with nudge-wink diversions like a Leone shootout parody, Christmas wreaths replacing tumbleweeds and Jingle Bells twanged on a reverb-soaked Stratocaster, Morricone-style.

Played by a chap called Wee-Man (he would struggle at a Scottish kids' party), there has to be a message-based moral at the heart of the Yuletide fable. And that is to believe in oneself, no matter what menial task you do or what status you hold. Wee-Man became superhero *Elf-Man* to restore harmony. We can beat this in 2013, Broken Britain. On the chill wind, one can still hear: "He's making a list/And checking it twice/Gonna find out who's naughty and nice." Operation Yew Tree was certainly part of last month's festive ecology; let *Elf-Man* banish away the blues.

**Extras:** None. **JK.**





### MAY I KILL U? (15) Theatrical Release.

This strange horror comedy is nothing if not topical, taking its basic inspiration from 2011's London riots when the cops seemed helpless to prevent crazed youths from helping themselves to the latest in high-priced trainers and widescreen technology.

One cop who has a drastic solution to the street crime problem is Barry 'Baz' Vartis, played by comedian Kevin Bishop. He's all three of the killer cops from *Magnum Force* rolled into one, only he rides a pushbike in a high-visibility jacket (rather than a Harley in fetishy YMCA leathers) and doesn't have the full blessing of his superiors. He's also a bit of a nerd.

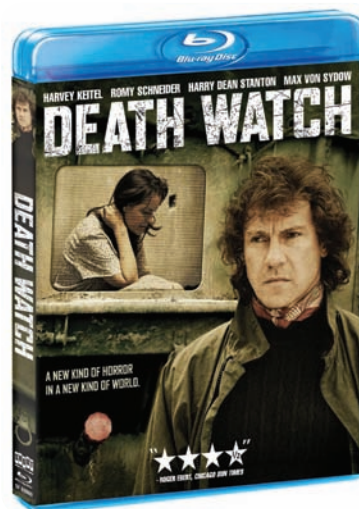
Baz is a community policeman who seems about as much use as a one-legged man in an arse kicking contest. The turning point for him comes when a local thug knocks him off his bike and gives him a serious bump on the head. From that point on he turns nasty, though his middle class vigilante tactics have a slight twist: the victim must give him permission to kill them, hence the title.

As fortune would have it, he soon comes across the thug who injured him robbing a flatscreen TV from a shop. The guy says he would rather die than go to jail, so our hero splatters his head with the screen, *American History X*-style. He films the incident with his helmet-cam and posts the footage online, which of course gains him lots of public support on his anonymous site @N4cethelaw.

This inspires him to continue in the same vein, while his cop partner (Hayley-Marie Axe) becomes increasingly concerned for his state of mind. Other villains who get their just desserts include Bulgarian sex traffickers, from whom he rescues sexy Kasia Koleczek, a feisty beauty who is also happy to commit murder under the right circumstances.

Frances Barber also appears as Baz's mad mum, an alcoholic wreck who is obviously destined for a body bag at some stage of the proceedings, and *The Green, Green Grass's* Jack Doolan appears in framing scenes of what at first appears to be a police interrogation but is later revealed to be something quite different.

Writer-director-producer Stuart Urban previously gave us *Revelation* (2001) and the odd sex comedy *Preaching To The Perverted* (1997). Here he seems uncertain whether he is making a social media statement (with onscreen tweets), a black comedy ("Anyone else speak English and been raped?" Baz asks a truck full of trafficked women), or a straight horror flick with one or two effective gore scenes. Sadly it's not successful on any level and directed in a rushed, slapdash manner. **AB.**



### DEATH WATCH (1980) DVD/BLU-RAY

**Out Now. Park Circus. Certificate: 12.**

When Endemol titled their reality TV show *Big Brother*, presumably the intent was with irony. But what the moronic series gave rise to, spreading rapidly across the globe, is anything but a sly joke: it ain't just *Big Brother* that's watching us, but our little one, his cousin, her neighbours, all the Queen's horses and all of her men. Reality TV controls the airwaves in proportion to the rise in CCTV monitoring,

a nation obsessed with watching the mundane in a search for meaning. Whilst we have had a fair share of dystopian game show movies (*My Little Eye*, *Series 7: The Contenders*), it seems that the genre most reflective of the reality TV boom is that of found footage: a similar artlessness and commitment to patience-testing with very little pay-off, all resulting in lazy non-spectacle. However, in 1980, French director Bertrand Tavernier made the science-fiction thriller *Death Watch* that stands as chilling precursor to the current trend that plagues our screens. Roddy (Harvey Keitel) is the first human VCR created by a major network, tiny cameras implanted behind his corneas: the price he pays is never to sleep or allow his eyes to be exposed to darkness for long amounts of time, which would render him blind. TV producer Vince (Harry Dean Stanton) wants to commission a new show called *Death Watch*, following the last weeks of Catherine Mortenhoer (the disconsolately radiant Romy Schneider) who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness. For in this future, disease and degeneration have been eradicated and people grow old gracefully, unaware of approaching terminus. Vince feels that a show which allows the public to share someone's suffering and vicariously face death will be a smash hit. Suspecting that she may break contract, Roddy is assigned, like a roving spy, to meet up with the fugitive and watch over her until the end, as a country grows more addicted to the tragic soap opera. Predominantly set in Glasgow, this is a case of setting perfectly complementing its story: opening with a dramatic crane shot amidst the city's iconic Necropolis, it is both filmed with the vertiginous drama of San Francisco and a near-apocalyptic desolation, those infamously grey skies pregnant with doom-laden beauty, fuelling the mournful momentum of the tale's two protagonists, victims of a need to watch and a public desire to consume through voyeurism. Keitel is an intriguing presence, that wolfish charm disguising his mercenary vigilance: in the soft radiance of a traveller's hostel where he first meets Cathy, he seems to view her with compassion yet later calls Vince to proffer suggestion on the most dramatic part to start the edit with: likewise, when his lenses occasionally bleed out of focus, Roddy claims he merely got something stuck in his eye- but was it a tear?

It is this ambiguity that makes *Death Watch* such an ominous, well, watch. When Roddy searches for his subject in the hostel, the image is presented from his point of view but without the cathode-ray shimmer that signals broadcast footage: a sly appropriation of his observance to ours. From here onwards, as they take flight to the Highlands, nothing is to be trusted, every look from Roddy as he appears to fall in love possibly staged, each shot of Cathy potentially part of the show that we have unwittingly become party to.

Tavernier's dystopia is prescient and deeply moving in its despair. This is a world where raw emotion is experienced through analogue (or digital) signal and where dreams have no place, imagination replaced by a desire to record the everyday. As Cathy says, in a script written over thirty years ago, "Everything is of interest, but nothing matters."

**Extras:** 'The Morality of Filmmaking', an emotive interview with director Tavernier whilst attending this year's Glasgow Film Festival. **JK.**





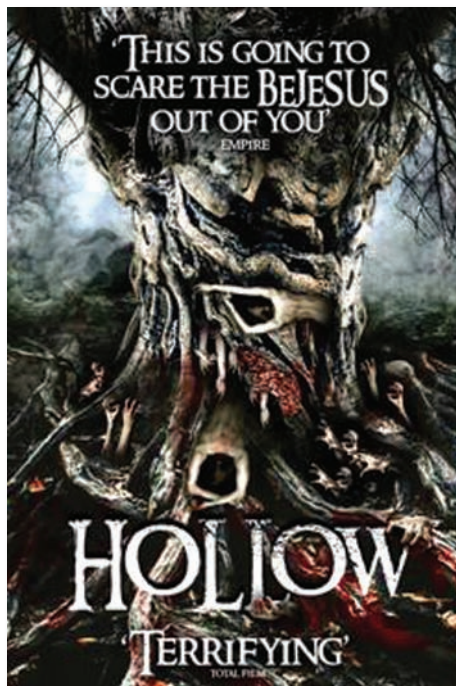
[www.dragondark.co.uk](http://www.dragondark.co.uk)



**HOLLOW (2012) DVD****Out Now. Metrodome. Certificate: 18.**

One has to be very careful in choosing a movie title for fear of ridicule. *Friday 13th Part IV: The Final Chapter*- yeah, right. *Pretty Woman*- yeah, right. Us rapacious critics will stretch any inch carelessly left hanging out to make a noose for the condemned. More fun is to be had with those that provoke a call and response: Flawless- were the filmmakers being deeply ironic?; What's The Worst That Could Happen? Sitting through this. And then there are titles that effortlessly write their own review: the found footage that was *Atrocious* for example. In a similar vein, we have Michael Axelgaard's *Hollow*.

Four twenty-somethings head for a weekend break at the Suffolk coast. In keeping with tradition, they are all fucking annoying. Two motives become apparent: Emma, whose late grandfather's house they are staying in, wants to connect with her past, particularly conquer fear of a forlorn hollow that has proved a popular suicide spot for young couples. Her best friend and ex, James, has brought a camera along not only to document any spooky findings, but also to record the breakdown between Emma's engagement to her fiancé that he hopes to engineer with the help of an unwitting, and token, blonde. In amidst the drunken games of strip poker and wild nights on charlie, Emma reveals more about the floating hooded figure that has been seen lurking by the tree, to counteract the mind-blow-



ingly banal. Like so much found-footage, *Hollow* presents itself as an exhibit held by police: from the off, we know these characters were found hanging from the titular oak, so there's no tension of outcome. Any excitement, then, will rely on the unfolding supernatural explanation and the human drama of jealous losers and misspent affection. For the former, standing on a road with a camera in the middle of the night shouting, "Who's

there?" into the darkness, does not necessarily constitute either suspense or atmosphere. Likewise, hanging monk's cowls from branches, vandalising phone-boxes or filming roadkill. As for the saga of James's sorry love life, the characters, with the exception of Emma perhaps, are vain and selfish, deserving of everything they get. In fact, so repugnant is their behaviour, James could probably sell the tapes to Jeremy Kyle, where this film is most likely to find its niche: at least the sneaky voyeur would be vocally booed every time he lies about whether his camera's turned on or not. By the time the final act bothers to step forward, respite is on the horizon. Trapped in their vehicle by the tree, one of them announces that they only have fifteen minutes of battery life left on the camera and its light. Fifteen more minutes of watching a car interior being filmed in detail! Countdown to how much more to endure before these charmless oiks are hung out for our misery. Set in the desolate cliff-top location of Dunwich, a former kingdom seat with a settlement of Knights Templar that was swept into the sea, one would think that there might have been some inspiration. To cash in on H. P. Lovecraft's reputation, it could even have been titled *The Dunwich Horror*. Instead, the filmmakers bravely decided not to disguise their turd and call it like it is. *Hollow*.

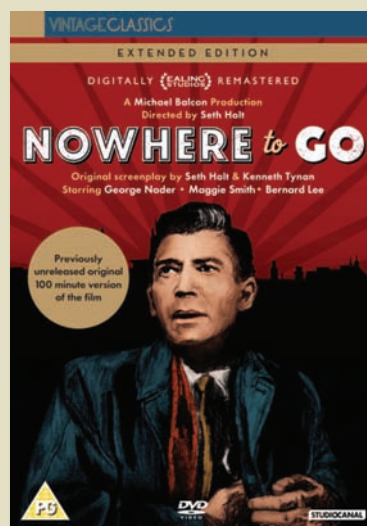
**Extras:** None on review copy. Might have to wait until the Jeremy Kyle 'Loverat' edition... **JK**.

**NOWHERE TO GO (1958) DVD****Out: Now. StudioCanal. Certificate: PG.**

A deserted train platform at night looking out at a vast rampart. As a group of coppers walk out of sight along its perimeter, a man scales the wall, a mere shadow, precursor to a jailbreak. As foreboding as the station was in its emptiness, the prison is a walled city, streets hemmed in by the looming severity of perpendicular fortification. Filmed in glistening high contrast and almost noiseless save for the tense metronome of watchmen's footsteps, the striking opening sequence of *Nowhere To Go* is comparable to the silent bank heist in Jules Dassin's *Rififi* in its stylish suspense, whilst crystallising the film's fugitive theme and imposing sense of entrapment. The sprung bird is Canadian conman Paul Gregory (George Nader), whose crime was duping a rich heiress out of a rare coin collection she was in London to sell. With the money secure in a safety deposit box, Greg was willing to do time, emerging when the heat was off. That was the plan, scuppered somewhat when he received double the sentence he was expecting. Enlisting his partner Sloane (Bernard Lee) to set him free a few years down the line, all Greg has to do is lay low for a few days, retrieve the money, pay his associate his due and Sloane will get him swift passage on a banana boat. That was the plan.

Of course, it gets thwarted somewhat by the coincidental presence of the prosecuting officer at the bank on the day he was due to make his withdrawal. Sloane wants his dough and Greg is crossed by his old chum, requiring a double one in return: as the desperate felon bounds back and forth between underworld cronies looking for help, the intersecting crosses become like the hatching of an Escher drawing, leading nowhere but to square one.

*Nowhere To Go*, presented for the first time uncut (MGM trimmed 15 minutes), is an expressionist noir laced with irony. Co-scripted by theatre critic Kenneth Tynan, the dialogue drips with his renowned cynicism and acidity: when asked why he wears a surgical shoe to go to the bank, Greg retorts that "nobody ever looks a cripple in the eye"; a mordant exchange between widowed victim and the Canadian, posing as a playwright, has him confessing he doesn't know what to do with the old lady in the second act.

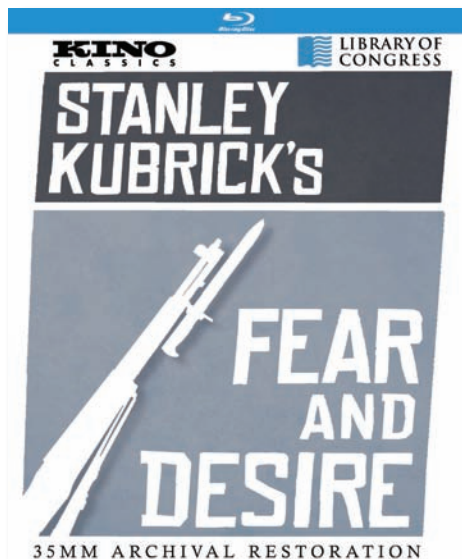


Matching this is debuting director Seth Holt's assured grasp of image and sound. Commissioning jazz trumpeter Dizzy Reece to provide the music, Holt cuts in a jangling, percussive improvisation during moments of Greg's foundering insecurity, undermining the more relaxed compositions reflecting the character's poised iciness. Also striking is Holt's sardonic observation of the developing relationship between protagonist

and another betrayed outsider, Bridget, the last person Greg can turn to. In her first role, Maggie Smith plays Bridget with empathetic warmth to mask her vulnerability, in sharp contrast to the brittle suspicion that Nader emits to hide his. Quietly tragic and filled with a despair unusual for British noir, it is a pleasure to rediscover *Nowhere To Go* as a compelling variation on the fugitive theme.

**Extras:** 'Revisiting *Nowhere To Go*', an all-too-brief background on the film featuring interviews with crew members and film historian Charles Barr. **JK**.





**FEAR & DESIRE  
(1953) Blu-ray**  
Out Now. Eureka!  
Entertainment.  
Certificate: 12.

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Referenced in Stanley Kubrick's first feature *Fear & Desire*, this line from John Donne is given cynical regard. Citing the most pre-eminent Metaphysical poet of the age seems apt, the film's

narrative inhabiting an allegorical no man's land both inhuman and corporeal, yet mystic and preternatural. But the unifying sentiment within the quotation marks has no place in a modern world obsessed with mutual destruction, its perpetual battleground full of aggressive, psychotic egotism: the filmmaker would return to these themes with *Paths Of Glory* and *Full Metal Jacket*. Every man for himself.

In an unspecified war of the 20th Century, four soldiers become stranded six miles behind enemy lines after their plane crashes. When a stronghold occupied by the opposition is spied nearby, the group is faced with the dilemma between fear for their lives or desire for victory: get to safety or take out the general.

Made in 1953, and edited and photographed by the director, *Fear & Desire* marks Kubrick out as a very precocious debutante. The platoon is often filmed in separate close-ups, highlighting their individual humanity but also presenting them as an alienated unit. What is shared is terror, the overdubbed anxious thoughts of the men as they walk through the jungle cascading over one another, barely distinct, until collective, consciences ironically unified in paranoia. There are two sequences that provide early evidence of how masterful Kubrick was at creating abstract horror. The first details a surprise attack on an enemy cabin at dinnertime: the 'heroes' thrusting their knives directly at the camera become part of a montage of hands reaching out in their death throes at bowls of food: there is something so abject in the grasping at slop, so wasteful as it drips on the floor in still aftermath. Similarly, the corpses are filmed at distorted angles or upside down, monstrous in how unnaturally they have been laid to ruin. The other concerns the relationship between a captive woman and the youngest recruit of the group: left alone together as the others construct a raft, Sidney tries to win the girl's attention with a buffoonish, overblown performance that allows repressed mania to tragically spill forth- chillingly played by Paul Mazursky, who would later make *Down & Out In Beverly Hills*, Sidney is the wretched precursor to Jack Torrance and Private Pyle. Hampered at times by self-consciously poetic, literary dialogue, it is ultimately Kubrick's surreal imagery that pushes the story into the realms of the mythic that the script so diligently yearns for. The director tips a bitterly absurdist nod to the psychic fracturing that war inflicts, prefiguring *Dr. Strangelove*. And then there are the final images, deranged and confused as smoke cloaks the landscape: the four protagonists damaged islands, drifting out of focus on the fog of war.

**Extras:** Kubrick's first three docu-shorts, *Day Of The Fight*, *The Flying Padre* (both 1951) and *The Seafarers* (1953): the first two exhibit a filmmaker learning to use imagery and editing to heighten drama, whilst the latter is a bland for-hire job that the director took to raise money to finish his feature- what does unite all three, however, is how instinctual Kubrick was at photographing ordinary faces: Concise and intelligent introduction by scholar Bill Krohn; Lavishly designed booklet on *Fear & Desire* and the shorts by Kubrick expert James Naremore. **JK.**



**PIRANHACONDA  
(2011) DVD**  
Out Now. Chelsea  
Films.

**Certificate: 15.** Giant-mutant-hybrid monster movies may have noble parentage (*King Kong*, *Godzilla* and all his kaiju clan), but sometime in the last decade, that bloodline was corrupted forever by the inmates at The Asylum. Dispensing with the pioneering stop-motion techniques of Willis O'Brien or the lurching

'suitimation' and detailed miniature effects of Eiji Tsuburaya, these clowns of the mockbuster rely on badly airbrushed CG and threadbare rubber to excrete their bum-grade battles such as *2-Headed Shark Attack* and *Mega Python Vs. Gatorade*. Or something. SyFy slithered onto the 'badwagon' with *Mongolian Death Worm* and now, ever one not to exploit a cheap trend, Roger Corman is in the fray as executive producer on *Piranhaconda*.

So we're in the exotic location of Hawaii. There is a biology professor (Michael Madsen, shedding a vague skin of a performance) who is tracking this "evolutionary mutation" to avenge his dad killed by its hungry maw. A Z-grade slasher film crew with high-maintenance starlet and hunky stunt guy. Some terrorists who kidnap and hold the lot of 'em to ransom. And, wait for it, not one but two (!) piranhacondi and a host of eggs (!!!!!) in case *Cool Hand Luke* wants to come along and repeat his infamous trick. Now that would be something.

I can imagine the treatment for this film consisting of a Post-It slapped on Corman's desk, "*Piranha + Anaconda* = : )". That which does not involve this basic genetic make-up consists of 'down-with-the-kids' quips ("If there is something out there, it would have been on *National Geographic* or YouTube") and jokey 'it's only a film, duh' asides all bashed out with the alacrity of a serial onanist at a pool party. Speaking of which, someone involved seemed to have a predilection for bikini-clad Asian babes, as this is what the, presumably male, *Piranhaconda* initially likes to wrap itself around. As for the creatures themselves, they're big, pixellated and blocky as if some FX geek forgot to format the design files. They're also far more serpent than snapper- *Anaconda With Pointy Dentures* might be a more suitable title. And this is probably *Piranhaconda*'s biggest failing amongst its nest of them: due to its size, the beast can only really bite people in two (or block escape routes with its giant coil that our stunt driver no-sweat negotiates) as opposed to gorily chomp them to death. This occasionally manifests itself in a couple of severed torso prosthetics, but more often than not results in a digital spray of red stipple to hide the lack of imagination and mirror the mist of anger clouding the cheated viewer's vision. In amidst all this CG debacle, director Jim Wynorski (*Chopping Mall*) chucks in inserts of exotic creatures, presumably to remind us how good real ones are.

On reflection, every *Dark Side* reader can start lobbying Mr. Corman with Post-It possibilities far more worthy than this mismatch. To start us off: *Hippopotamarmoset*. *Rhinocero-celot*. Or, a marriage of mankind's vermin, *Margaret Ratcher*. Suggestions on a postcard...

**Extras:** Trailer. **JK.**



### DJANGO, PREPARE A COFFIN (1968) DVD

**Out Now. Arrowdrome. Certificate: 15.**

The morbid iconography of the Western began for me, rather literally, with the dead men avenging known only as *High Plains Drifter* and *Pale Rider*, drenching an already stained town in blood or replicating a fatally vicious circle of bullet wounds. And then, at the tail end of adolescence, I encountered *Django*, dressed in black with piercing blue eyes, an ironic angel of death, hauling a coffin filled with its instrument. Things wouldn't look the same again in the American West. Yul Brynner in *The Magnificent Seven* - an iconic undertaker. That dark horseman approaching on the horizon as Clint and The Schofield Kid discuss killing a man in *Unforgiven* - the Grim Reaper himself? Perhaps even Django.

Despite countless identity frauds, this is the only film that bears his true name: it may not be the best 'sequel', but it is the character's official one. Five years back, Django's wife was slaughtered in a treacherous ambush and him left for dead. Putting his own name over her grave, he is now an anonymous executioner, hanging those who cry innocence in a town under the influence of corruption. But he is actually saving the unjustly condemned via a hidden body harness, forcing them to become part of his own band of dead men

walking in gratitude for their lives. Beyond mopping up the psychotic thugs who run the place, Django has a score to settle: scrap the old colleague who betrayed him and ruined his prospects of family, who also happens to be behind the spate of bullying in Nowheresville.

*Django, Prepare A Coffin* is a better-than-average Spaghetti Western. The clichés are all present, of course: crash zooms and echo-heavy twangs to underscore obvious moments; eccentric comic character, in this case a parrot-owning postmaster who mutters in overdubbed bumble; casual misogyny, albeit, thankfully, rather inexplicit in this case. As for the violence? Relatively graphic, with a floor-pinioned torture scene and a neat face explosion as Django spins the trigger whilst offering handle-first surrender. Plus there is an extended saloon inferno, bringing a welcome apocalypse to proceedings just before they were in danger of sizzling out of their own accord.

Casting is provocative: Horst Frank plays the deranged Aryan über-villain with ruthless superciliousness, in lieu of



Klaus Kinski, and George Eastman is supremely greasy as the leader of the baddie pack. But there are two big surprises: Terence Hill is obviously styled to look like Franco Nero, but manages to propagate the lineage somehow admirably, bringing a battered altruism to the role, a far cry from his more famous Trinity, but with the germ of that character's savoir faire; Garcia, played by boxer José Torres, is a brooding

presence, simmering with disdain, yet his blunt rationale for betraying his liberator, in an inverse eye-for-an-eye situation, is harsh but vindicated. It is in the final sequence though, that Ferdinando Baldi's film makes the most impact. Poised between two traitors in a cemetery, Django merely digs his grave to unearth a coffin, crude crosses surrounding him, before he faces his fate against a posse of mounted assassins. With morbid iconography so distinct, be it Eastwood or Django, the Western gunslinger inhabits a dismal purgatory. There are no winners or losers, only oblivion, endlessly cyclical and compromised. We've all got it comin'...

**Extras:** Trailer. **JK.**

### PIRANHA (1978) BLU-RAY

**Out Now. Second Sight. Certificate: 15.**

If giant-mutant-hybrid monster movies are the science fiction of the creature feature, then species-with-attitude zoology is its perverted neo-realism. [Stay with me on this.] Ordinary Joes striving to counteract an irrational environment, suddenly hostile and inexplicable. Except with killer animals. *Jaws* rode the crest followed by a whole school of aquatic annihilators - *Orca*, *Tentacles*, *Great White*, whilst on land we had *Grizzly* pawing for attention. But the real little critters chomping at the bit once Amity Island became infamous were grinning piranha.

Joe Dante's superb parody has ditzzy private investigator Maddy MacGowan (Heather Menzies) head out to the Texan swampland to search for a missing couple. Teaming up with reclusive, embittered alcoholic Paul (Bradford Dillman), they discover a military test-site and semi-deranged marine biologist Professor Hoak (a pitch-perfect Kevin McCarthy). Despite his protestations that they shouldn't mess with a site of shady scientific interest, the meddlers nonetheless drain a pond to look for possible corpses and inadvertently flush a savage breed of GM product into the river system, threatening not only local tourism but the great outdoors experience itself. Fishing in these parts will now provide a new strain of R 'n' R: ripped and ravaged.

Almost 35 years since it was released, *Piranha* is still as fresh as the water its noshing nuisances swim in. Stimulated by a deluge of cameos, the film courses with knowing confidence: Barbara Steele as a brainwashed



ice-queen, Dick Miller, typically, a cynical bozo and, most amusingly, Paul Bartel as a pathetically despotic scout leader.

Complementing the demonstrable wit and B-movie fun on display (reckless stunt driving and speed-boat explosions serve no narrative purpose), there are well-executed theatrics to the various attacks: beginning as a flurry of alien gobble, screaming victim and bubbling red froth, the campiness gives way to serious nastiness, as a cub scout outing is granted more than a fishy feet spa, the finned fiends picking at toes, nibbling at fingers and chomping toward crotch: the editing is so rapid-fire and dizzying, it almost induces panic in the viewer. Produced

by Roger Corman, who had an estimable knack in betting on guerilla talent, this was Dante's first feature aided by a sly script by newcomer John Sayles, both filmmakers now known as subtle subversives: whilst Sayles uses episodic melodrama to expose the hypocrisy and corruption of authority (*Lone Star*, *Matewan*), Dante couches his satire in live-action genre cartoons, taking pot shots at gross consumerism (*Gremlins*) or the terror of mutually-assured destruction (*Matinee*). *Piranha* goes for the jugular of military and scientific ethics: when the only solution likely to stop the contamination is to flood the swamps with poison, shattering the local ecosystem, a general's pat response is, "Sometimes it's better to destroy than to save", a sentiment echoed when he refuses to abort summer festivities at a resort influenced by army investment; Professor Hoak, for his part, claims he engineered this strain of organic warfare for the department of defence simply because the money's better than in private research. With its working class heroes, indirect digs at social injustice and bitter depiction of a power structure oblivious to the welfare of its citizens, Dante's film, like Spielberg's, could be seen as miscreant neo-realism gone Technicolor. The cannibalistic critters are only the half of it.

**Extras:** Good 'making-of' paying particular attention to the large cast of FX technicians (including Chris Walas and Rob Bottin) and editors Dante and Mark Goldblatt; Outtakes with extra Dick Miller footage; Vintage behind the scenes montage; Commentary with Dante and producer Jon Davison. **JK.**





### THE IMPOSTER (2012) DVD/Blu-ray

**Out Now. Revolver. Certificate: 15.**

"I wasn't pretending to have an identity any more. I stole one."

This line could have been spoken by any film noir antihero, the genre most associated with imposture and slippery personae. Instead, it is spoken by Frédéric Bourdin, the tricky subject of this unsettlingly compelling documentary.

Bourdin was a drifter with a disaffected upbringing, which had taught him to exploit circumstance: a chancing chameleon, yearning to find

an adoptive home where he could be accepted. Whoever that 'he' might be. Whilst held as an anonymous missing person in Spain, the precocious lad convinced the authorities to let him make private phone calls to his 'family'- in effect, calling police stations across the US until he stumbled upon something that could be exploited.

In 1994, thirteen year-old Nicholas Barclay, blonde and blue-eyed, went missing from his home in San Antonio, Texas. Almost three and a half years later, Barclay turned up in Spain, dark-haired with facial attributes to match, and speaking with a heavy French accent. Incredibly, the Barclays received him as their own, bringing him to America. Intercut with traditional talking heads, director Bart Layton dramatises this stranger-than-truth story as shadowy fiction. Discovery of Bourdin: camera cranes in to a lonely phone booth, rain hurling down on the streets like a hail of bullets, to a hunched, cowering shadow, friend or foe? This noirish tone sets the reconstruction. Later, as the ruse begins to take definite shape, the foregrounded silhouette of the imposter casts glistening reflection in a mirror, a double in polar contrast. Using a younger look-a-like to portray the protagonist, Layton syncs Bourdin's real voice with the actor's lip movements: at times, the facsimile maps his originator's gestures, especially in a grin wide with indulgence, edited seamlessly between performance and subject to spooky affinity. Both effects show how easy it is to create disorienting subterfuge through calculated mimicry: indeed, there is one true moment of fright when a subsidiary character raises his face to the lens and...it's our imposter! But, for a second, which one?

It is in the filming of Frédéric that ushers creeping unease to settle in. Positioned closer to the camera than the other interviewees, his face looms large over the narrative. The admitted strategy is to catch him off-guard, editing in outtakes of Bourdin quizzically smiling, pondering, sighing: however, there's a moment when he suddenly snaps his glance direct to us with wolfish knowing- is his 'downtime' another role he's playing? This arch ambiguity moves to actual shock mid-way through when a vocal impression Bourdin repeats to camera boasts that he's been having the audience on right from the off, just like everyone else that's come into contact with him, not least the relatives of the lost boy.

And what of them? A mother who cannot recognise her own son? The Imposter's accumulative strength is in its final chapter, where the lies and deceit reach ghastly potential. Charlie Parker is introduced driving around and searching, authentic Southern gumshoe, a real-life M. Emmet Walsh from *Blood Simple*. His initial suspicion falling from 'Nicholas' (amusingly, he guessed the fakery through ear-lobe 'technology') to the family itself, the accusations are genuinely macabre. Bourdin whole-heartedly, and separately, endorses them, but is this further insult from a sociopathic liar convinced of his own legacy? Layton's camera can only glower at the individuals in the Barclay unit as it tries to grill Bourdin. Nothing gained, as in the final shot of a questing Parker facing a void. *The Imposter* is oddly horrific in its merciless ambiguity. The audience become both judge and jury without a clue yet with all of them. There is devastating pretence and stolen identity on both sides, literal or not. It would be easier if the whole affair was mere fictional noir.

**Extras:** Excellent making-of; Q & A with Layton and producer Dimitri Doganis, plus the wonderful Charlie Parker. **JK.**



### DEAR GOD, NO! (2011) DVD

**Out Now. Monster Pictures. Certificate: 18.**

A bunch of homicidal bikers go on their day-to-day rampage rapin' and killin' everything in sight. *Dear God, No!* An offbeat family unit presided over by a maniacal scientist up to perpetual no good, not least with his daughter and spousal succubus. *Dear God, No!* Bigfoot at large, destroying the local habitat by ripping out the entrails of all it comes across. *Dear God,*

*No!* Does anyone with sense need to watch this repugnant pastiche of grindhouse excess? *DEAR GOD, NO!*

Executive produced by Dusty Booze and featuring Lemony Zest and Creepy Kenny in its cast, one might be forgiven for thinking that The Garbage Pail Kids are behind this movie, such is the scatological artlessness on display. There is lots of breast exposure, featuring one extended topless lap-dance performed by a stripper wearing a Reagan mask that would bore the wood off even Hugh Hefner. Dialogue astonishingly crass in its assumption of wit: "I can see you are indeed insatiated on excrement" (YES! Full of shit! How apt.) And a sickening torrent of gratuitous violence that only pitches gleeful camp to the genre it aspires too in the last fifteen minutes, with acid-induced Nazisploitation, comic-book slaughter and overblown sasquatch action. Sorry, blacked-up man in a monkey suit. But, dear God, that which precedes it? No!

Director James Dumpster Baby Bickert's noxious stream of consciousness chokes with its primal misanthropy. With the biker degenerates doing nothing but swear at the camera over the opening credits, we expect attitude, but nothing as mindlessly offensive as what is flung at us. Inbred children, rednecks, nuns, strippers (women, lots and lots of women) are killed for no other reason than simply "Fuck them." Added to this contemptuous (in) sensibility, there are slanders against gays, retards, and women, lots and lots against women.

Admitting in the commentary track that he conceived the film whilst he was being pressurised by his wife to have a baby, Bickert decides not to wrestle with his demons in an abstract way like, say, David Cronenberg did with his pained exploration of the inchoate anger that divorce brings forth in *The Brood*. *Dear God, No.* Not content with aggressive references to coat-hanger abortions and mothers making their daughters taste where they came from in the script, the director has one of his characters rape a pregnant woman. Still not content, Bickert himself plays the guy who then stabs the bump repeatedly before disembowelling the foetus from it. Reprehensible.

Cinema may be seen as a medium to explore one's obsessions and neuroses, to beg illumination or perhaps offer temporary respite in allegory. But *Dear God, No* is a bilge-tank from a filthy mind, exploiting personal anxiety to despicable fantasy. Watching it makes one feel overgorged with excrement. Yes. Force-fed shit.

**Extras:** The less said about the unrepentant director's commentary the better; Commentary with three of the actors, foul-mouthed and juvenile ("There's my rapin' face!"); crap zombie and torture-porn promo parodies; Vlog The Magnificent at the World Premiere, where Bickert's mates bemoan the lack of 'baby rape' in the final cut (can we have these idiots arrested?); *Behind The Scenes* gag reel, quite literally, when the cameraman films his own balls. For any reason? *Dear God, no;* Crudely animated short featuring characters from the film; Trailers, poster/stills gallery, illustrated booklet. Sadly, no towel provided for the shower you will inevitably take if you bother to watch this repulsive dreck. **JK.**



# SHORT NOTICES



## MY EX II: HAUNTED LOVER (2010) DVD

**Out Now. MVM. Certificate: 18**

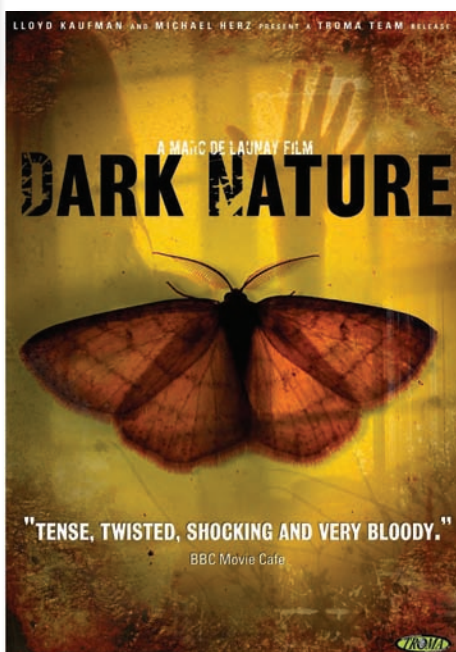
*My Ex* is back on the scene again, gusseted up somewhat, but ultimately as flighty and conceited as the first time round. C'est la vie. Keeping me in the punhouse for the time being, this sequel concerns two women vying for the affection of a layabout, cute Cee and demure Ying: when Ying is rejected in favour of the aspiring actress, who dumps him anyway, she lobs herself off a building. Tarot readings, ignored Buddhist tradition and, erm, Rubik's cubes point the way toward deathly vengeance. Not quite as slick or jumpy as its predecessor, this Thai horror nevertheless provides, for the most part, some supernatural distraction. But, with its film-within-a-film tricks and self-conscious layers of dreamscape, *Haunted Lover* quickly becomes like the multi-coloured puzzle that is its central motif: rather simplistic despite

gaudy appearance. With a coda suggesting further lovelorn grief to come, it looks like the gold-digging phenomenon known as *My Ex* will be around for a bit longer. **JK.**

## GANGSTERS, GUNS & ZOMBIES (2012) DVD

**Out Now. Lion's Gate. Certificate: 18**

Cor blimey, guv'nor, would you Adam and Eve it? To make a bit of cynical bees and honey after the success of *Cockneys Vs. Zombies*, we 'ave another bunch of dodgy East Enders facing up to the undead fer yer mincers! These geezers not only have to do battle with clowns and LARPer wearing cheap grey mudpacks to signal living death, but somehow endear us to get through the 88 minutes of cobbles that make up the running time. With performances beyond the Khyber Pass, a tom tit script and horror quotient that's truly J. Arthur, the film's sole reason to have a quick butcher's is a shotgun-wielding granny whose rabbit is rather salty. Beyond that, leave the berks that suffered this apocalypse on us to asphyxiate in their film's own pen and ink. **JK.**



## DARK NATURE (2009) DVD

**Out Now. Matchbox Films. Certificate: 15.**

*Dark Nature* would like to expose the seedier side of human endeavour. It ends up exposing mere ineptitude. Jane and family travel to her mother's house in a remote coastal part of Cumbria: unbeknownst to her, matriarch has been killed by (dark? (un)natural?) forces unnamed. There's a surly gamekeeper that makes Lurch seem charismatic and an idealistic botanist moping about, both either harping on about parasites or environmental destruction. Systematically, people get killed in unimaginative ways: the alleged reactions of the actors boast equal lack. Billed somehow as an eco-horror, this tawdry piece at least wears its cause on its sleeve by recycling every cliché of mulch common to micro-budget slasher dross: such pretension is mere scum on the film's plain surface. Like flies to wanton boys are the audience to *Dark Nature*'s filmmakers. They kill us for their pointless sport. **JK.**



## THE POSSESSION (2012) DVD/BLU-RAY

**Out Now. Lionsgate. Certificate: 15.**

Ever since *The Exorcist*, possession is nine-tenths of the running time, mounting in severity until a suitably hysterical expulsion. The difference here is that, where most of this genre concentrates on Christian ritual, *The Possession* features a dybbuk as its parasite, a malignant Jewish spirit intent on destroying its host. That would be ten year-old Emily, younger child of recently divorced couple Clyde (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) and Stephanie (Kyra Sedgwick). After picking up a Hebrew-inscribed box at a yard sale, it is not long before the girl starts exhibiting autistic behaviour coinciding with freak occurrences: bug infestation, poltergeist fridge raids, sudden gum disease.

Ole *Nightwatch* Bernald's film is well constructed with frosty 'Scope photography opposing intense white against plush darkness, dramatising the central contest; the effects are also impressive, as is the glacially precise editing. But the other, more interesting, conflict dangled in front of our noses, that between Clyde and his ex, who blames him for the change in Emily's behaviour ever since the separation, becomes mere carrot: sadly, the story opts out of metaphor to focus on far more formulaic goings-on, albeit with a Hasidic bent. It seems that ever since *The Exorcist*, possession films must follow nine-tenths of an unwritten law.

**Extras:** Bernald provides an existential, deadpan commentary worth the invitation alone; So-so writer's track; Featurette on dybbuk boxes. **JK.**





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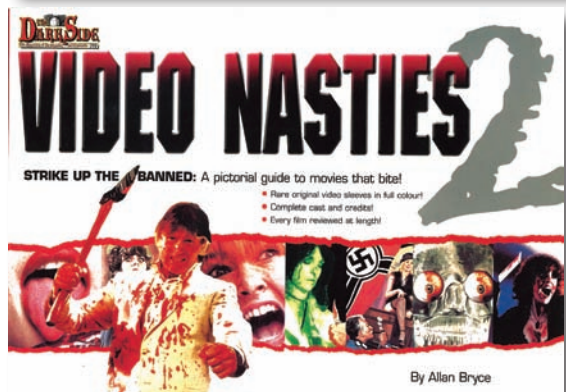
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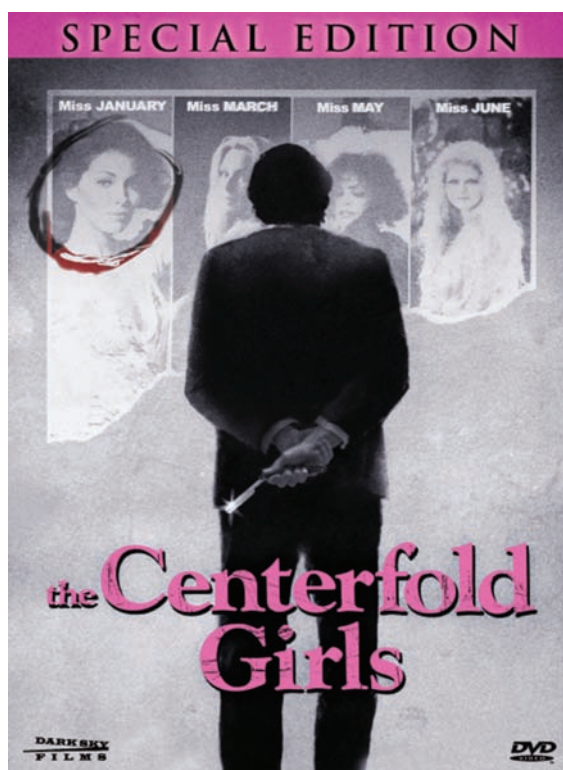
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# *My Angel is a* **CENTRE**



**B**-movie maiden Jennifer Ashley has had a wide and varied career: starting off in a number of bit roles, which includes a part in Brian DePalma's classic glam-musical *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974) and the slasher-shocker *The Centerfold Girls* (1974) before earning her leading lady stripes in the likes of the hit exploitation comedy *The Pom Pom Girls* (1976) and the British-made *Alien* tie-in *Inseminoid* (1981). However, the performer's most notable, mainstream success came with her talk show *Ashley's Closet*, which finalized her move out of B-cinema – something she admits she was not sorry to leave behind. Nevertheless, the actress has left an indelible dent on the screen for any lover of seventies schlock and typically proves to be an alluring, captivating beauty, even when given the barest chance to light up the screen. Yet, irregardless of whether she was playing the sultry, but shy, Laurie in Joseph Rubin's *The Pom Pom Girls*, or essaying a bit part as a hardened prison inmate in 1983's *Chained Heat*, Ashley usually handled her scenes with admirable enthusiasm. Now busy with her own clothing business, *The Dark Side* spoke to the starlet during her lunch break and found her happy to reminiscence about her exploitation movie past...

**The earliest credit I can find for you is on 1973's *Your Three Minutes Are Up*. Did you do any work in films or commercials before then?**

Yes I did, but we are going back a long time now (*laughs*). Here is what happened: I was working in the music business when I first came to California. Back then I was based in San Francisco, not Los Angeles, and I was discovered walking down the street by some agent. That is honestly how it all began for me. This guy just walked up to me and asked me if I had done any acting – and then he introduced me to a man who did television commercial workshops and he was also a photographer. Well he took me on and the acting jobs started from there but, to me, performing seemed like a good idea because I had done a whole number of plays back when I was in high school. I was always into drama – and I had a lot of that in my young life anyway (*laughs*) – so it seemed oddly fitting to me. I thought to myself “I am a chameleon and a ham anyway so why should I not do some of that on the screen?” So my first job was not on *Your Three Minutes Are Up*. It was on some other movies. It was just little parts but, you know, I was grateful for





# FOLD

Calum Waddell  
chats with legendary  
scream queen  
Jennifer Ashley

whatever I got handed. Here I was, this girl from Philadelphia who lived with her parents all her life, got married and then I went to California, got discovered and got offered movie parts. The very first thing I did was as an extra in a movie called *The Candidate* with Robert Redford, which was very exciting. That was shot in San Francisco and then I did a non-union film called *The Tournament*, which was supposed to take place in medieval times. I played a princess and they tied to me this tree for hours and hours – it was insane, just this little low budget film. However, I was working in movies and I didn't care how small these parts were – I was at least getting some kind of start in the industry...

**You were also screen tested for *American Graffiti*, right?**

That is right - I was tested for *American Graffiti*. I went in and read for the role of Debbie, which eventually went to Candy Clark. But the same casting people decided I would be right for a small role in *Your Three Minutes Are Up*, so that is how that one happened. Now that was a fun movie to make and, again, although it was not a big role it led on to other things. It was because of that movie that I ended up being in *Phantom of the Paradise*...

**I want to talk about *Phantom of the Paradise* in a short while, but before that you did *The Centrefold Girls* for director John Peyser. What was that like for you?**

Arthur Marks produced *The Centrefold Girls* and he was such a great guy to work with – as was John. It was a good team. I remember when I first saw the movie I thought it was much better than I expected it to be. You know, it was not my aspiration to do a movie like that but I wanted to work. However, they wanted me to take my clothes off for *The Centrefold Girls* and that was not something I wanted to do a lot of - if at all (laughs). I remember being very embarrassed when I had to strip, very “oh my God do I have to?” And the gawking cameraman and stuff, the crew looking at me... I had to ask them to go away so I could take some time to deal with it. That took a lot of courage for me, to take my clothes off, but when you see it today it looks so tame. Nowadays you see everything, right?

**Of course, things have become a lot more liberal. *The Centrefold Girls* is now being re-released on DVD. Considering you sound a bit embarrassed, are you still happy to see it out there?**



**Above:** Jennifer worked with director Brian De Palma on the cult 70s movie *Phantom of the Paradise*. All she remembers of him now is, “He was horny.”





Oh yeah, I want all my films out there. Don't get me wrong, I was having a lot of fun back then acting in these low budget movies. These little movies paved the way for my TV talk show in Los Angeles, which I hosted for many years, so I have no complaints. And I did a movie about a year ago called *Frankie D* where I play a newscaster. So it is nice to be remembered!

**From a cheap exploitation cheapie like *The Centrefold Girls* to your brief appearance in *Phantom of the Paradise*: It must be something to have worked with Brian DePalma, right?**

You know, I remember meeting Brian DePalma for the first time. I remember that vividly. We came in to audition and he told me almost right away that I had obtained the part of a groupie. I was happy, even though I had no idea what I

was expected to do (*laughs*). Well, we got brought in, a bunch of us, and we all had to lie on a giant waterbed, it was an odd thing... But, yes, it was fun - although I felt a bit uncomfortable doing that one too...

**Why was that?**

Well because it was a bunch of young girls lying on a waterbed together (*laughs*). But I did look good in that scene. I have to say that. It was embarrassing but it was a good movie and when it came out it was a big film...

**How do you remember Brian DePalma?**

He was horny (*laughs*). How is that? That is all I can say about him. He was in a fantasy because he was around all of these beautiful young girls. But he was very nice and very creative and he is a great director. He has gone on to prove that over and over again.

***Nightmare Circus* gave you a bigger role. It was also your first outright horror flick. I imagine this ultra-low budget scary film was a big leap away from the comparative elegance of *Phantom of the Paradise* ...**

You could say that (*laughs*). We filmed that as *Terror Circus* if I remember rightly and then they changed the name. I had to drive myself out to Palmdale every day for that movie. I recall that one evening I got caught in a rainstorm coming back from the set and my window wipers did not work and it was a good two hour drive home. And I was always cold shooting that film (*laughs*). We had our little trailers but we mainly shot the movie in outside locations and I had this small, weird, tribal outfit on. But as long as I was working I was enjoying it and, yes, that was a much bigger role for me. Plus, working with Alan Rudolph was great.

**That was only his second film as a director I believe...**

Oh, Alan was just the best on *Terror Circus*. One of the producers of the movie started out directing it too and it was horrible! Thankfully, they brought Alan in to replace him and he totally turned that movie around. He met us all, individually, in our trailers before the shoot began and asked us what we wanted to do with our parts... To me, that shows you what a great, considerate director he is.

**You got your first big, meaty role in 1976's teen cheerleading comedy *The Pom Pom Girls*. Now that was quite a big success when it first came out, wasn't it?**

Let me tell you this - I got so many offers to do low budget movies after *The Centerfold Girls* came out in theaters. I don't think *The Centerfold Girls* was a huge hit but it certainly made money and people saw me in it. But after *The Pom Pom Girls* it went crazy for me! With that one it was just insane (*laughs*). Sometimes I had to turn down a whole bunch of offers. It was mainly the same type of films - cheerleaders and stuff... that was a big genre back then. Films like *The Pom Pom Girls* were playing at drive-in cinemas and making a whole lot of money. Young people flocked to that film...

**Indeed, in fact Tarantino once included it on his list of the top 10 exploitation films ever made. Did you get to see the movie with a drive-in audience?**

Well I liked to see the audience react to the films I was in so I would always try and see them in theatres rather than at the drive-in. But I went to the Cannes Film Festival with *The Pom Pom Girls* and it was crazy out there too! It went down so well in France and I began to be recognized on the streets of Cannes, which was quite funny.

**Had you seen any of the cheerleading movies that came out *The Pom Pom Girls* such as *The Cheerleaders* and *The Swinging Cheerleaders*?**





No, I had never seen any of these. I did not even know about them at the time. However, when I was interviewed for *The Pom Pom Girls* I knew it was going to be a worthwhile project. I did not know that it was following in the footsteps of other things. I knew it was going to be good, though, because of the director; Joe Rubin. He is a very talented guy and he wrote a very funny script. Plus, they had Robert Carradine attached to it and there was a special chemistry between the four leads in the movie. But even though I knew it was going to be entertaining I didn't expect it would be a big hit.

**Your character Laurie is the silent sex bomb in *The Pom Pom Girls*. How did this resemble your personality at the time, if at all?**

Yeah, Laurie was the virgin cheerleader and I was actually like that in high school. She was shy and innocent. She went with the crowd but was always soft spoken and that was what I was like too. The part was not much of a stretch for me at all. However, I am not one for swimming in the ocean, but we had to do that in one sequence, and I think you can tell – if you look closely – that I am not really enjoying myself (*laughs*). I also had to roll down a hill, for what reason I cannot remember,

and I didn't want to do that either. It was this big dirty hill, you know? But for years afterwards we were still hanging out together – the cast of that film was very, very close. It was a great time in my life.

**Had you been a cheerleader at high school?**

Yeah, I was a cheerleader back then.

**Did you remember any of your old moves for the film?**

No, they had us practice all of that from scratch (*laughs*). Some captain of a local cheerleading squad came and taught us everything. I was taking dance classes by the time of the *The Pom Pom Girls* though. In fact, I think that might have helped to win me the role.

**You mentioned being surprised by the film's success. When did you first realise it was becoming a hit?**

Well everybody loved it at the first screenings I went to so I sort of knew then... There was so much laughter and an insane amount of clapping. Dustin Hoffman actually saw it and called me in to read for a part and Bruce Springsteen told people at his concerts to go and see it. I look back at that now and realize how funny it all was.

**Do you see films like *The Pom Pom Girls* as the father of similarly sexy, and lewd, teen comedies such as *Porky's*, *Screwballs* and *American Pie*?**

Yes I do. I think we represented the beginning of these movies. It set the precedent in a lot of way. I think even the Brat Pack films, like *St Elmo's Fire*, owe something to *The Pom Pom Girls*.

**Where did you shoot *The Pom Pom Girls*?**

The beach that we are all cheerleading on during the opening credits was in Malibu, and it was beautiful, and then we worked at Chatsworth High School for the rest of it. We did a lot of the scenes in the locker room, and inside the classrooms, just at a normal high school. Joe Rubin let us be very creative. For instance, I love apples, I eat a lot of apples, and I asked him if I could do that onscreen – just because I related to the character and wanted to bring some of my own ticks to her. That is also why she chews gum. He went for all of that. That was the first movie where I was allowed to bring my own ideas to the table.

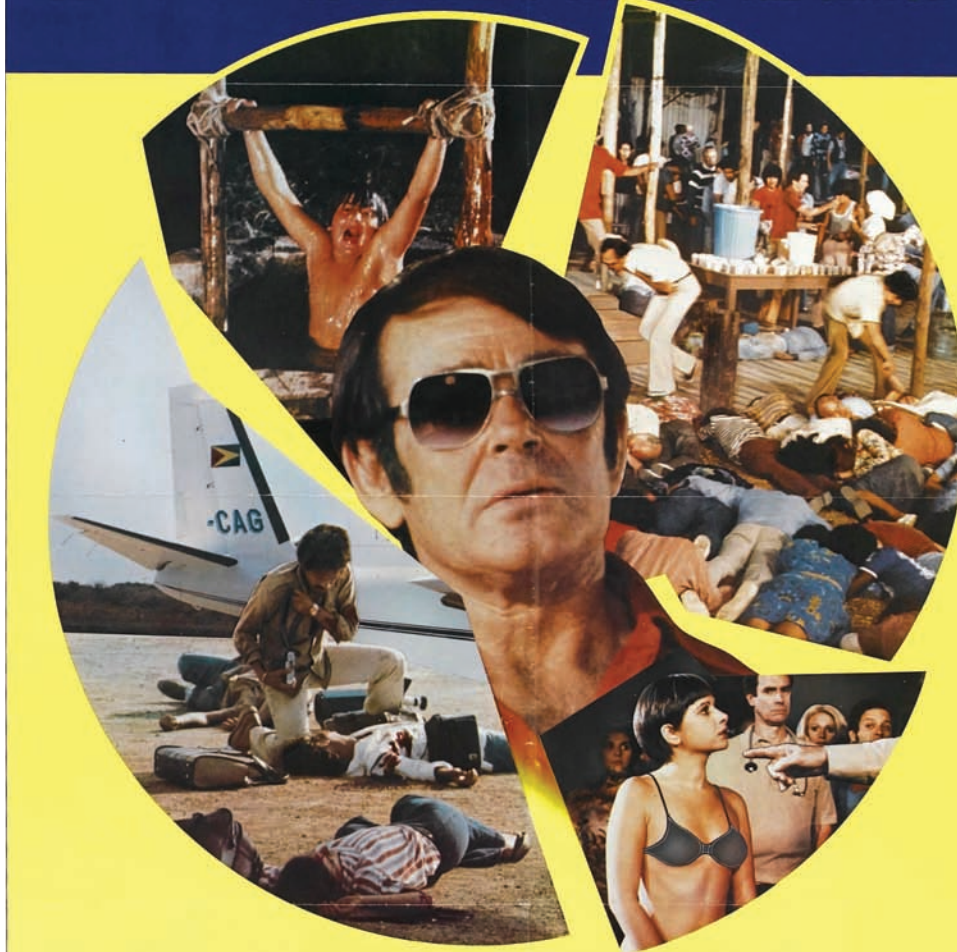
**Your *Pom Pom Girls* co-star, the cult starlet Rainbeaux Smith, had also been in *The Swinging Cheerleaders* and was beginning to make a name for herself back then. Can you share some memories of her?**

**Above:**  
Jennifer as  
Talia in the  
*Planet of the  
Apes* TV series.





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I remember finding out Rainbeux Smith died and I was so shocked. We never really kept in touch. But who knew about her problems back then? I didn't know. She was like a little baby. She was very innocent. I did keep up with a lot of the cast though – but I haven't seen Lisa Reeves or Susan Player for a long time. I don't know if they are even working any more. We used to have parties at my house back then and Bobby Carradine's entire family would show up – I got to know them all.

**After The Pom Pom Girls you starred in a low budget *Jaws* rip-off called *Tintorera*. What convinced you to get involved in this?**

I signed with a big agency before *Tintorera* and they were the ones who decided to put me in that movie. I think it was because Susan George was the lead so they felt it had some prestige. I was flown out to the tropics, we worked near Cancun for a couple of months and I really enjoyed that part of it. I mean, can you imagine being paid to go on a two month vacation for two months? When I came home I felt like I had culture shock (*laughs*). *Tintorera* was not the hardest movie to do but, once more, I was a little embarrassed – and this time it was because I had to play a drunken hippie (*laughs*).

**Do you remember much about the films release in the US?**

I don't know how it did in the States, but the reviews were *horrible*. They said it was a rip-off of *Jaws* – which it was – but, hey, I liked it anyway.

**Can you talk about the director of *Tintorera*, Rene Cardona Jr.? He was quite an established B-movie maverick by the time you began working with him...**

I never even knew that! Rene was great, a very sweet man. I adored him. He did very well with the resources he had on that film. You know, I worked with Blake Edwards on *The Man who Loved Women*



and, in all honesty, give me Rene Cardona any day (*laughs*). He gave me so much more to do than Blake Edwards. When I did *The Man who Loved Women* I went up to Blake Edwards and asked him for some motivation and he said "Just do whatever you feel is right because you are the actress and that is your job."

**Guyana: Crime of the Century saw you acting alongside the likes of Gene Barry and Stuart Whitman in an attempt to exploit the Jonestown Massacre...**

That got horrible reviews too (*laughs*). They said it looked as if they had got their stars from a 1958 casting sheet. We were in Mexico City for that one and they built this exact replica of Jonestown. It was very eerie. I played a communist in it. I was Jim's mistress – a girl called Anna Kazan – and before we began shooting *The LA Times* did this huge expose on her so I got to read a lot about her. In the article it mentioned how she followed Jones right to the horrible end, so I tried to draw a little bit on that kind of insanity. I got to give people the kool aid in the movie (*laughs*). That was the eeriest thing because after we did that sequence I went back to my room and there was an enormous earthquake in Mexico City. Very scary. The people were so nice though. The Mexican people are the warmest, nicest souls. But that film... yeah, it was a very eerie experience.

**Having met Norman J Warren, who directed you in *Inseminoid*, he seems like the perfect gentleman. Was that also the case when you worked with him?**

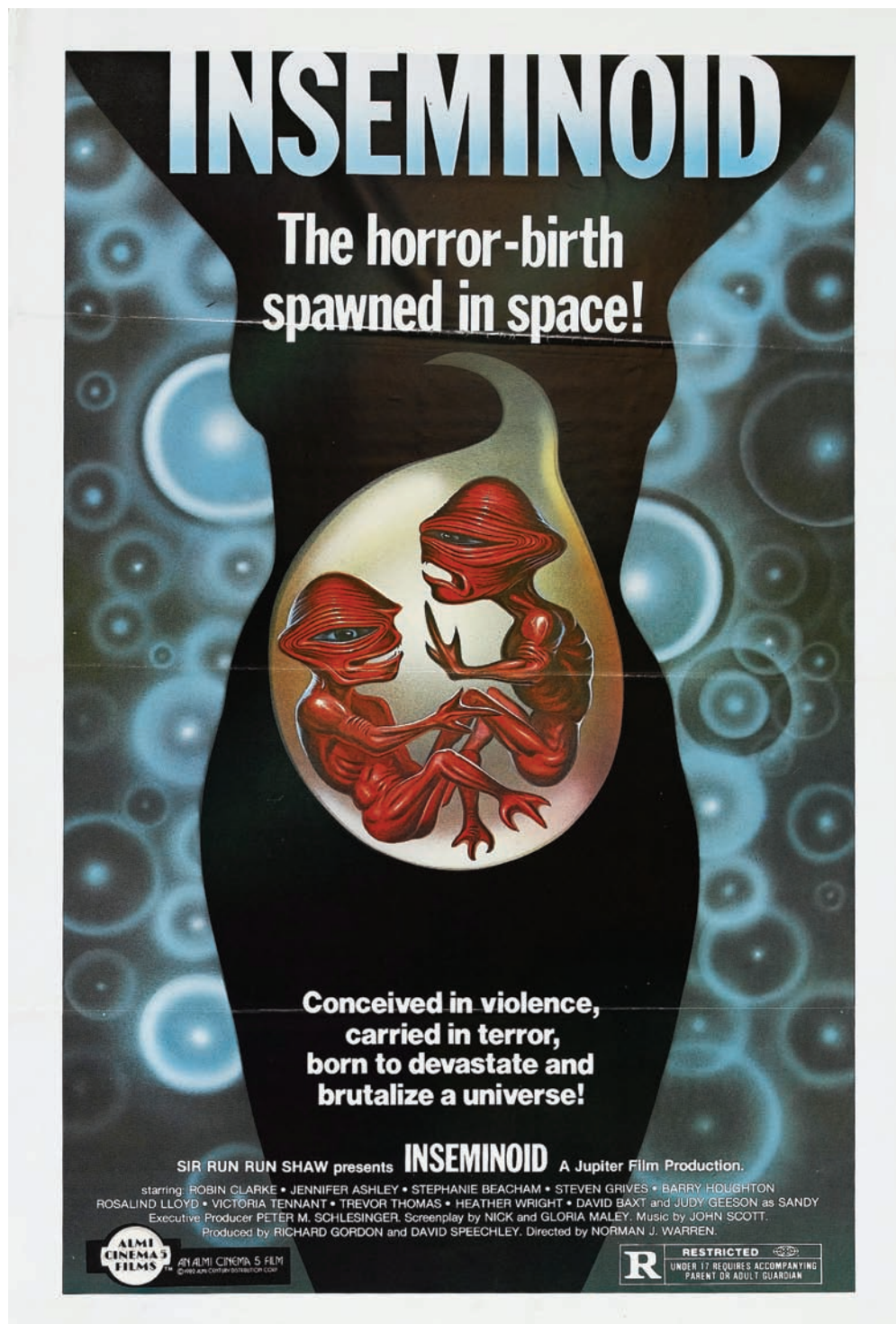
Yes, I adored Norman. He was so easy to work with and just the nicest guy. He worked us hard on *Inseminoid*, though, and it was freezing cold in these Chislehurst caves that we shot the film in. We were in London, and that was the best part of making that movie. I wanted to see London and I got to stay there for two months. It was one of the perks of being an actress (*laughs*). We were driving an hour out of London every day to work in these caves in the English countryside and it was so cold. We all had to wait around to film our scenes and it was just ice cold. But we were being paid so you didn't complain (*laughs*).

***Inseminoid* was an obvious rip-off of *Alien*. Were you aware of that when you began production?**

No, because I had never seen *Alien*! So it all felt very original to me. I believe in aliens but never saw the movie (*laughs*).

**How do you feel *Inseminoid* holds up today?**

Oh yeah, it is great. My husband has watched that film quite a few times and my kids love it, even if it is very gory. We even won some kind of award for the soundtrack at one movie festival. They had this great, eerie music on *Inseminoid*, which I thought was very atmospheric, and I still have the original album. I wonder if that is worth anything on eBay...



***Inseminoid* has since become something of a cult film, but it was not a big hit when it came out. As a low budget UK production, how did it go down in the US?**

Universal bought the movie and they thought it was going to be this huge success and, sadly, that wasn't the case. But it did play everywhere when it first came out. I think the distribution for it was quite strong.

**Nevertheless, *Inseminoid* led you on to *The Man Who Loved Women*, with Blake Edwards...**

I played Burt Reynold's mother when he was six in *The Man who Loved Women*. Of course, that meant I never got to meet Burt (*laughs*). Like I mentioned earlier, though, Blake Edwards was nice but he just didn't give me



Above: Jennifer in Blake Edwards' *The Man Who Loved Women*. Opposite top she can be seen on the beach in the low budget *Jaws* ripoff, *Tintorera*.





Right:  
Jennifer as  
one of *The  
Centrefold  
Girls*.



any direction. His feeling was that actors are hired to act. I played a hooker mom and that gave me something to work with. You know – why is she a hooker in the 1940s? Maybe she is just trying to support her kid and this is all there is but, with the time period, she needs to be secretive. I was thinking all of this stuff. I tried to bring at least something to my roles, you know?

**You had a small role in 1983's women-in-prison throwback *Chained Heat*, with fellow B-movie maidens Linda Blair, Tamara Dobson and Sybil Danning. It is a pity, considering the cast, that the end result was not more explosive...**

Oh God, I forgot all about *Chained Heat*! That was another weird location. We shot in an empty prison but I was going through a divorce, which had me angry, and I had to play this inmate with temper issues so that worked out well (*laughs*). I was a friend of Linda Blair's in that movie and, yeah, it was interesting enough. It was a hard shoot though and very low budget but I thought I did a good job. They let me do my own hair and my character was called Grinder, which is quite cool (*laughs*). She was a wild one and quite good fun to play.

**After that you largely disappeared from movies to host your own hit talk show *Ashley's Closet*. Were you fed up with the business?**

Actually, *Ashley's Closet* just took up all of my time (*laughs*). I worked on getting my own guests and the show took off for me so I went with it. I was also doing commercials and I just didn't want to do B-movies anymore. It didn't feel suitable..

**All the same, do you have a favourite role from your career?**

I loved doing a movie called *Towing*, which we have not spoken about. It is not so famous, but I am very proud of it. Maura Smith, the director, let me improvise a lot on that and I got to work with my friends Joe Montegna and Sue Lyon. I had a blast and I really enjoyed myself. But I have to mention *The Pom Pom Girls* just because it was very successful and really got me out there. *Inseminoid* was great too because it has become such a cult classic.

**So tell us what you do now?**

I have a clothing company now called Hippie Inc. I have a web site – [www.hippieinc.com](http://www.hippieinc.com) and I sell women's clothing and have a whole line of products. But I also did a part in this film with Todd Bridges called *Frankie D*. You know, you never lose acting. It is always there and if I got offered a really good part then I would definitely do it. I still have an agent but right now I am totally dedicated to my clothing company, and I have two little girls, so I have a busy home life. But, like I said earlier, it is great to know that people are still watching, and enjoying, these old films.

(With thanks to Elijah Drenner for making this interview possible)



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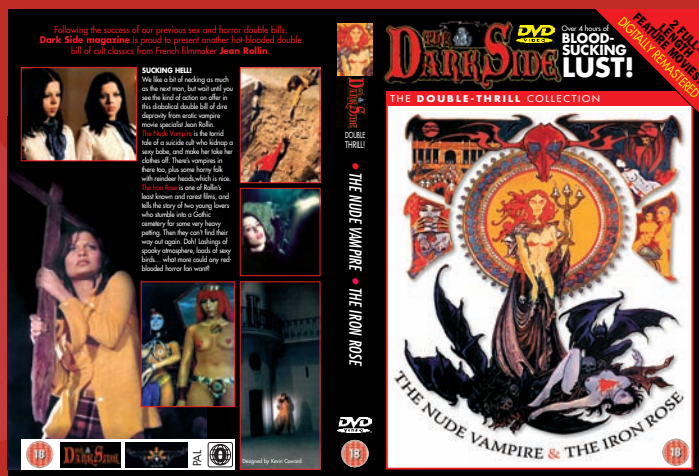
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**The Nude Vampire** is the torrid tale of a suicide cult who kidnap a sexy babe and make her take her clothes off. There's vampires in it too, of course. Plus some folk with reindeer heads.

**The Iron Rose** is one of Rollin's lesser-known movies and tells the story of two young lovers who stumble into a Gothic cemetery and can't find their way out again. This was in the days before mobile phone SatNavs of course. Lashings of atmosphere and some very bloody and erotic scenes.

**Double Thrill 2: Pervy Pirates and Naughty Nuns combine for a double dose of Euroschock insanity.**

**The Demoniacs**: More Rollin madness in a surreal pirate film that takes place on land for the sake of cheapness. A band of brutal shipwreckers rape and murder two young girls, only to find them coming back for revenge as sexy spectres in clown makeup! Deliriously daft, but strangely compelling also.

**The Sinful Nuns of St. Valentine** are a far cry from Julie Andrews. Sexy young Lucia is locked away by her family in order to keep her apart from her lover Esteban, but the nunnery is a hotbed of depravity and it's up to Esteban to rescue his paramour before she goes on the turn and develops some very dirty habits! Nudity, whippings, lesbo sex and a happy ending - what more could any *Dark Side* reader with Catholic tastes want?

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